The Children of the Meadows

Mittie Owen McDavid

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THE CHILDREN OF THE MEADOWS

"THE CHILDREN WERE BOTH IN A REVERIE."

Chapter 13.

Frontispiece.

THE CHILDREN OF THE MEADOWS

BY

MITTIE OWEN McDAVID

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of other stories for children

ILLUSTRATED BY

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TO

MY YOUNG SONS

EDMUND, JR., AND JACK McDAVID

ILLUSTRATIONS

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The Children of the Meadows

CHAPTER I

'WAY down in Alabama, nestling amid the soft blue mountains, lay the Elmore plantation. It was called "The Meadows" on account of the beautiful green fields sloping away in front across the main road.

The house was set in a shady grove of oaks and maples and faced terraces planted in shrubs and trees of many varieties. There were lilacs and japonicas, cape jessamines, crêpe myrtle, and bridal-wreath bushes; with here and there an althea or mimosa tree. Down on either side of the driveway gate, standing like sentinels, were two tall magnolias. At night as one sat on the broad piazza the perfumed air was at times almost overpowering in its sweetness.

At the back of the house were two gardens divided by white painted palings. These were the vegetable and the rose gardens. Stretching out toward the mountains to the back and left of the gardens lay the negro quarters, a long lane

fringed on either side with cabins, and bordered with chinaberry trees, under whose umbrella-like shade the little pickaninnies played all day long. To the right of the house were the orchard and the vineyard and the outhouses, and farther on yet the pastures, where the cows and the horses stood knee-deep in clover.

A trout brook ran through the meadow, and on its banks, drooping toward the water, were weeping willows and evergreen trees. Here the cattle rested from the noonday heat.

The Elmore family consisted of Mr. Elmore and Mrs. Elmore and their four orphan grandchildren,—George, aged eighteen; Ben, aged eleven, and the twins, aged eight, who bore high-sounding names. They were Albert Barnwell Elmore and Elizabeth Winship Elmore, commonly called Barney and Bessie, respectively, for short; and a more mischievous set of twins it would have been hard to find anywhere.

The time about which I write was during the Civil War. Mrs. Elmore's husband and her grandson George were in the army. Her husband was now a colonel, and George was a member of Forrest's Cavalry.

For many weeks the children had gone down,

and, from the pinnacle of the big gate posts or the horse block, watched the armies pass. How in the world could we fail to win, they thought, with all those soldiers passing, passing every day? They did not know there were so many soldiers anywhere.

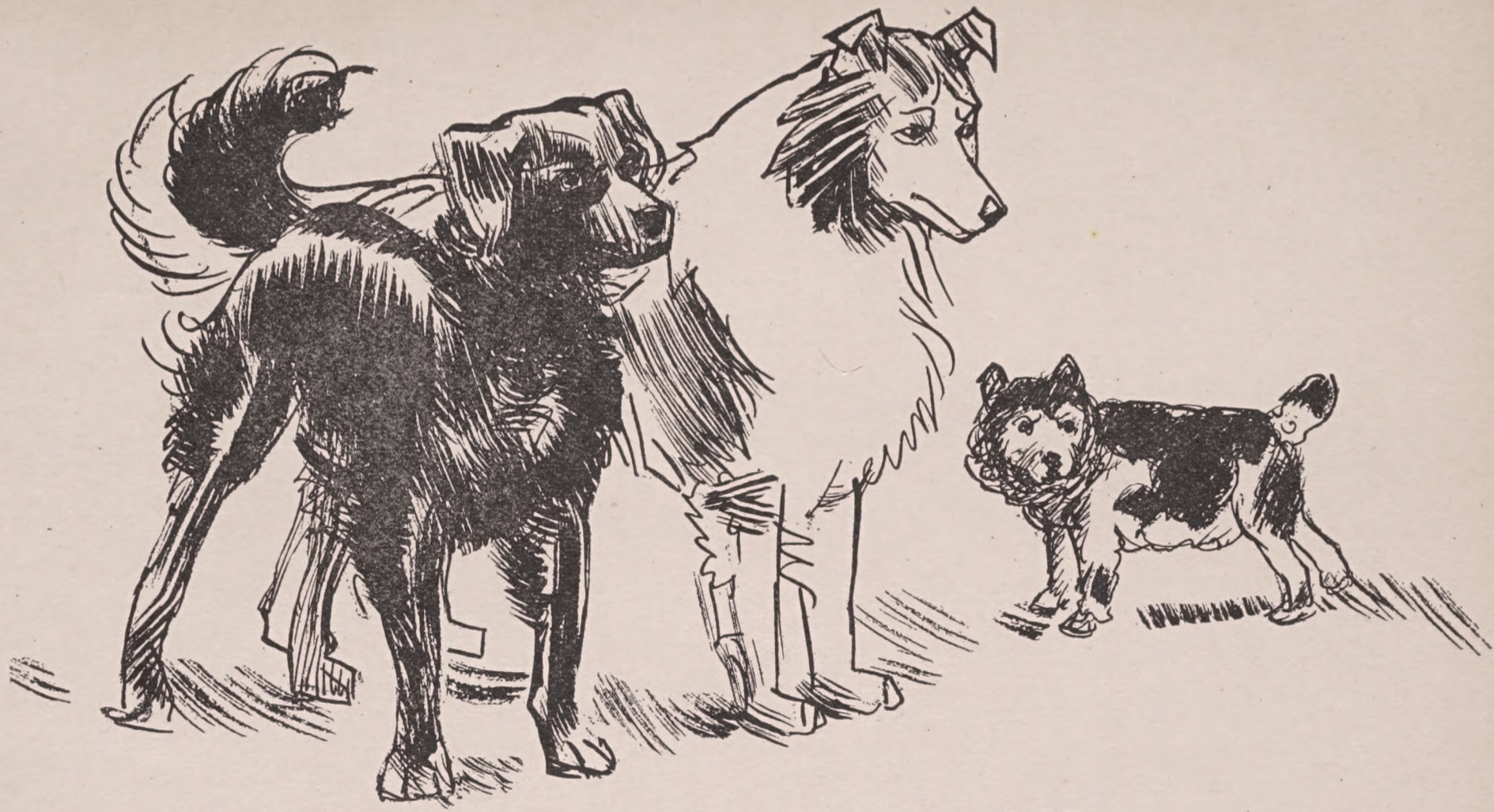
I was about to forget three important members of the Elmore household. They were the three dogs belonging to the children. Queen, the black shaggy Newfoundland, was Ben's; Bragg, the beautiful tan and white collie, was Barney's own property, and Bunny, a little curly black and white French terrier, was Bessie's pet.

Queen was often hitched to a small cart and driven by the children, and she seemed to enjoy it as much as they did. Bragg rounded up the cows and sheep in the afternoon and brought them home. Little Bunny allowed no intruder to enter the premises without protest from her. Dressed in doll's clothes, with a hat on her head, she would sit in a little chair at Bessie's doll table, with paws on either side of her plate, and drink from a glass. Each dog was so intelligent in its own way as to be almost human, and no sum, however great, could have bought them from their owners.

About two miles back of the plantation lived the Elmores' nearest neighbor, a Cherokee Indian chief, named Chineabee. This old Indian had for some reason remained behind in the days when the last of his red brothers left the state, and had entered several acres of land. It was a pretty level tract of meadow land, and the old man made quite a sum of money each year raising horses for the autumn sales. He was a shrewd old Indian, who had acquired some learning and many of the white man's arts. The Elmore children ran in and out of his cabin with impunity, for he was glad to have them come.

Just by his door stood a large chestnut tree, and often on an autumn afternoon they sat on his low door-step opening the golden burrs and filling their pockets with the brown nuts, while Chineabee smoked his pipe in the doorway and told them stories of his Indian boyhood in Alabama eighty years before,—days in which the Indian rode fearlessly over those same fields and hunted among those same blue mountains.

One day Bessie showed him a chestnut burr containing two chestnuts on one side exactly alike and told him they were philopenas. This seemed to amuse the old Indian, who, taking his pipe from



"Three important members of the household"

his mouth, said: "You and Barney philopenas, too." And ever afterward he called them the "philopena children."

The other neighbors were widely scattered. The nearest of these was the family of Jonas Schmidt, a Dutchman, who lived off the main road just four miles below.

Schmidt was quite a character in the community. Notoriously lazy, he refused to go to war. He wouldn't fight anything, but would run away from any kind of fight. He seldom worked more than one day in the week, although Jack of all trades,—carpenter, mechanic, and blacksmith, and could turn many a dollar his way when he pleased. But he seldom pleased. His family was composed of himself, his wife Polly, and his hound dog.

Polly's temper and sharp tongue were the dread of the county. While she was fond of Jonas and really supported him by her thrift and hard work, there were times when, like Rip Van Winkle, he could bear her scoldings no longer. Then, with his dog, he would leave home and wander to the forest or village, miles away, till her temper cooled. He was an excellent neighbor, though, a

good nurse for the sick,—helping others in many ways by his sunny nature,—and a general favorite.

Other neighbors were the families of Dr. Murray, the only good physician in a radius of twenty miles, and of old Deacon Jones, who both lived ten miles away, in opposite directions. The latter lived all alone in a dilapidated cabin with his little granddaughter Jennie. They were very, very poor. The old man, a lazy hypocrite, who never paid his debts, had, however, one redeeming trait,—his love for, and tender care of, his little granddaughter, the child of his dead daughter. He went about the plantations, sometimes helping with some easy work for pay, and occasionally accepting alms.

There had come so many rumors of raiders headed South, that many women, who were living alone on the plantations since their husbands, fathers, or brothers left for war, began to band together in one household, or else sought protection in the homes of their kindred.

Recently three cousins of the Elmores had come to them. They were beautiful girls, in their teens, named Alabama, Fannie, and Lucy. They

were the life of the house, helping Mrs. Elmore in caring for the children and in many other ways, but it must be said, petting and spoiling the children constantly.

CHAPTER II

IT was a lovely spring morning. The air was redolent with a hundred perfumes, for in the old garden at The Meadows the musk roses and hyacinths vied with buttercups, violets, and lilies in casting their sweetness upon the soft breezes. The mocking-birds were caroling as if they would burst their little throats and the impudent blue jays, busy with the importance of building nests, were darting in and out among the low syringa bushes.

Since daylight the twins had been getting into trouble. Barney had begun by jumping over a fence onto the scythe and nearly cutting his great toe off. Now they had raised a mighty disturbance in the kitchen, and Aunt Nora, in a loud and angry tone, was saying: "Lawdy, dese chillun done pestered de life outen me dis day. I knowed you two twinses wuz de guilty party whut fastened dat Tom cat up in dis kitchen closet to jump out at me when I opened de do' an' skeer me plum stiff an' cold." But her words fell upon deaf ears and she waved her spoon at the

"You knows I hates cats"

empty air, for the miscreants had flown and were now halfway down the lane to the spring. However, she went on with her tirade: "You knows I hates cats like pizen anyhow, steppen' 'bout on dey sof' feet. Dey des' lak some folks I knows —allus handen' yer a sof' paw an' er meaowin' ter yer so easy lak, an' de fust thing yer knows dey done spit in yer eye an' scratched yer in de back. Ain't no consider'ble diff'unce 'twixt some beastes an' some pussons, I sez. Ain't dat so, Brudder Jake?"

"Da's so, da's so," answered the old man, as he poured sorghum in his gravy and mixed it thoroughly with a slice of corn pone. "I'se seed some mens whut needed jes' bristles an' er tail ter make 'um hogs."

Soon the old cook had forgot her anger and was singing her favorite song, "Nora, Nora, opan de winder, let de dove come in." Mrs. Elmore had once gently remonstrated with her, telling her that the correct way was "Noah" and not "Nora," but she stoutly held to her own conviction that she was right, that Nora was a chosen name of the Lord's, and that some "pore white pusson" had corrupted the name by calling it "Noah." In vain Mrs. Elmore tried to convince her that it

was written "Noah" in the Bible and that the Bible was right, but she was stlll a woman convinced against her will and therefore unconvinced, and continued to sing it her own way.

In a little while she broke forth again: "Fer de Lawd's sake, Brudder Jake, I 'spec's you gwine ter founder yo'se'f! I done believe I heered Sis Hannah callin' you. She 'bout ready ter go, an' here you set! You eat much longer, an' you'll sho hater wash dat plate an' cup yo'se'f."

Quickly Jake sprang up and kindly helped her to finish the dishes, after which they both went in haste to their cabins. Aunt Nora could not be blamed for her impatience on this particular morning, for it was the twenty-third of April,—a great day for the darkies on this and the neighboring plantations, being their annual day for baptizing the "Brothers and Sisters of the Rising Sun," and therefore a holiday. This ceremony usually took place at the Elmore mill-pond, where there was a sloping greensward, well shaded, for the spectators. Situated conveniently near was a small church, which Colonel Elmore had had built for the negroes.

Old Uncle Israel, the regular parson, sent word that he was down with the rheumatism, and

Irvine, a young preacher of doubtful religious fervor and sincerity, was to conduct the services. Many of the good colored folk regretted this, for very few had confidence in Irvine's faith—too many underhanded deeds had been traced to his very door.

By daylight the darkies began to gather. Many of them had walked or ridden for miles, carrying baskets, buckets, and bundles, for they were to have dinner on the grounds. As there were eighty to be immersed, it would be an all-day ceremony, and services at the church always preceded the baptizing.

Ben and the twins coaxed their grandmother to let them go, for Flem, Barney's own little negro and often his companion in mischief, was one of the negro boys to be baptized. Finally Mrs. Elmore consented for them to go, and they started early for the pond, with Queen, Bragg, and Bunny at their heels.

The negroes were coming in droves from the quarters, all dressed in the very best finery that each owned, or could borrow. Soon Mammy Hannah appeared on the road. Her black bombazine dress was ornamented by a purple fichu drawn across her breast, and a faded black bon-

net, on which reposed a large jet butterfly that time had bereft of one wing, was tied underneath her chin with purple ribbon. In her wake, putting the finishing touches to his toilet as he went along, hurried Uncle Jake, every now and then stopping to wipe the dust from his "jeans" and his brogan shoes with a bright red handkerchief. In his hand he carried a Bible, a gift from "Old Miss" many years before. They were presently joined by Sarah, all in white tarleton. Her hair, which was habitually worn in little pigtails "wropped" with white string all over her head, was now combed out and hung in coquettish corkscrew curls over her shoulders, the effect having been gained by applying to it a liberal quantity of oil and then curling it around a stick.

The three soon came up with Dilcie, waddling up the hill and completely out of breath, for Dilcie was built like a porpoise and did not hurry through life. Her dress was of green muslin, with great crimson Hibiscus blooms chasing one another diagonally across it, for she reveled in color. Her sleeves were voluminous and flowing, and her hat was made of varied and sundry things, being a perfect medley of passementerie, lace, and varicolored flowers that had been discarded in ages

past by many Elmore belles. Serenely bobbing over one eye was a huge magenta plume. When she caught sight of Jake she could not refrain from a bit of her usual "sass."

"Lordy, Brudder Jake, ef you wuz ter fall down, you'd break yo' neck sho', wid dat Mount Sinai collar!" she panted. "You rersembles a 'possum peepin' ovah a whitewashed fence."

"Huh!" snorted Mammy Hannah indignantly, "some folks allus lookin' fer motes in dey neighbor's eyes. Ef Mistah Sherman could git a squint at dat headgear er yourn, he'd be so skeered he'd turn his army right round an' take ter dey heels right back to Yankeedom. I ain't never seed sech er lid! Hit puts me in de mind uv a jumpin' cow, wid a boad ovah her face."

The voice of Irvine, loudly giving out the opening hymn, put an end to the rather heated conversation, and all hurried into the church. The services lasted an hour, while Irvine preached, shouted, and exhorted. At last it was time for the baptizing to begin.

Down the hill from the church came the procession of white-robed figures, led by Irvine, also in a white robe. Around the waist of each was tied a sash of orange-colored cloth, bordered with

purple, the colors of the "Brothers and Sisters of the Rising Sun," and about the head was twined a turban of the same bright colors. It was a picturesque sight as they wound down the sunny road, singing lustily as they marched, the smaller ones leading next to the parson. The preacher descended the steps, going down into the water, still singing, and waded out waist-deep, and all the darkies took up the refrain:

"Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' fer ter carry me home,
"Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' fer ter carry me home!"

till the hills resounded with the weird music.

Flem was the first subject for baptism, and when he reached the parson the water was around his neck. Irvine leaned forward to catch him between the shoulders. As he did so a low growl came from Queen, the Newfoundland, standing on the bank, with ears pricked up. Although the preacher was robed in white and orange and purple, Queen recognized the enemy who had drowned her five puppies, and down in her heart she was sure that he meant to drown her friend and playmate, Flem. Just as Irvine caught up the negro boy and leaning backward was about

to dip him head and shoulders under the water, a loud splash was heard near the shore and the parson turned in time to see the Newfoundland swimming swiftly toward him. Now Irvine was mortally afraid of dogs and of Queen in particular. With a frightened yell, he dropped Flem into the water and bounded up the steps.

He had no idea of losing any time.

The white children on the shore screamed as the boy went down and the water closed over him, but Queen had reached him and as he came up, strangling and gasping, she had him by the robe and went plunging and swimming to the bank with him. Ben and the twins met them at the water's edge and pulled Flem to the bank, where, loosening her hold on the boy, the Newfoundland shook the water from herself and bounded down the road after the frightened parson.

Irvine was running like a deer across the open field, and Bragg and Bunny joined in the chase. But his progress was impeded by his wet, heavy robes that clung to his limbs as he ran, and Queen reached him just as he climbed into the branches of a low tree. Jumping high she caught him, tearing a great piece of white cloth out of

the seat of his robe, at which he began to yell, calling on the Lord to help him.

"Don't call on de Lawd," shouted a voice down the road, "call on somebody what knows yer!" and Uncle Israel came hobbling down through the dust, leaning on his hickory stick.

The boys, supporting Flem, were already halfway home, and the three dogs trotted after them, Queen still growling and holding in her mouth the piece of white cloth. Irvine, his teeth chattering, refused to come down, and Uncle Israel cried again, "Stay dar den, tell de buzzards come an' git yer!"

"Here," he called to a little negro sitting on the grass, "run to de house an' git my white gown an' yaller buff sash. I gwine ter see dat dis baptizin' goes on. Hit's de Lawd's will. He never 'tended fer no cowardly sinner to baptize dese 'Brudders an' Sisters of de Risin' Sun' nohow!"

As the boy ran off to do his bidding, he commanded, "Here, Brudder Deacon Samuel, an' you, Brudder Deacon Stephen, git down in dat water an' hope me."

The boy quickly returned, the old parson donned his baptismal robes, and the baptizing

"Queen reached him just as he climbed into the branches of a low tree"

proceeded with fervor. One after another the white-robed figures came and went. The three men swayed to their task like machines, singing all the time, their bodies moving rhythmically together. Uncle Israel's voice could be heard, now giving out two lines of a hymn, then singing, then repeating the baptismal words, now calling loudly above the noise of the singing, "A-a-*men!* A-a-*men!*" Sometimes from the swaying, shouting multitude a voice would answer, "Yes, *Lawd!*"

Finally the noise subsided slightly and the crowd held its breath in anticipation as old Big Mary, the participant in many a plantation fight, stepped forth. She was a field woman, weighing two hundred pounds, with the strength of a man, and she carried around with her a grouch that made her feared by other darkies. She stepped clumsily down the steps, her black face shining in the sun, and her thick lips protruding in a pout of self-consciousness and determination. All three, the deacons and the preacher, gathered for the plunge, knowing full well the difficulty of the coming feat. Down she went like an elephant, down, down, straight to the bottom, carrying the three men with her. In a few seconds they all

came spluttering to the surface in a different spot, and Big Mary, not waiting for the preacher's benediction, made for the steps, shouting, "De Debble's left my sinnin' hide!" and throwing water and mud like a beaver over old Israel and his assistants. The former, nothing daunted, however, followed her as fast as the water would permit, calling through alternate choking and spitting of water, "A-a-*men!* A-a-*men!*"

Big Mary's back, from neck to heels, was one mass of yellow mud that trickled in streams behind her, but oblivious of all else she marched straight ahead, slapping her hands and shouting, "Glory! Glory!" The crowd parted to let her pass, and Nero, squatting in the forks of a tree near the path, seeing her for the first time and the ridiculous plight she presented, burst into a sacrilegious chuckle, his big mouth spreading over his ebon face in an uncontrollable grin. The object of his mirth stopped short in her tracks and commanded, "Shet yo' mouf, you pot-black nigger!" which Nero promptly did, falling out of the tree backwards and dodging behind it. "You gwine ter bust yo' face yit, wid dat Mammon Cave mouf er yourn, you grinnin' sinner! You kin whisper in bofe years now," she flung back at

him, as she struggled up the hill in her dripping garments, her religious ardor considerably diminished by anger within and by the wet and the mud without.

The baptizing continued. In the midst of the frenzied shouting and singing Irvine climbed slowly out of the tree and crept away, backing along by rail fences and outhouses till he reached his cabin in the quarters. Flem, his robes having been dried out and pressed by his mammy, went down again and bravely tried his baptizing the second time, when it went off successfully under the guidance of good old Uncle Israel.

CHAPTER III

JERRY was an orphan boy whom Colonel Elmore and Mrs. Elmore had reared. His father had been Colonel Elmore's overseer, and had been faithful and attentive to the interests of his employer, who in turn had provided well for Jerry, sending him to school with his own children in the family carriage. Being about twenty now, and doing the chores night and morning,—cutting wood, bringing water, and milking the cows,—Jerry was a comfort to Mrs. Elmore, and she felt herself leaning more and more on him every day. She knew that he would probably leave her after a while to go to the front, for the call kept coming for more volunteers.

As yet no Yankee soldiers had passed that way, and the ladies had felt no apprehension of trouble of any kind from the raiders. Lately, however, they had heard that families in other states, and even in North Alabama, had had all their heirlooms stolen by the riffraff that often follows in

the wake of an army to plunder and loot, and Mrs. Elmore decided to send all her valuables to a place of safety without delay. She sent for Jerry and held consultation with him as to the wisest disposition of the silver, jewelry, and other things, which they finally decided to box up and bury in some secluded spot,—to be left there until the war should be over. Jerry thought the best time for executing this plan would be after dark when they would be safe from the prying eyes of the faithless darkies.

"Now," said Mrs. Elmore, "you will need some one to help you. You had better confide in Napoleon. He is absolutely trustworthy." Accordingly, Jerry went in search of him, trusting him as Mrs. Elmore did.

Old Napoleon was the dining-room servant, or butler, and had been in the Elmore family for many years—in fact, he was one of Mrs. Elmore's wedding presents, and had come from Virginia. As he habitually assumed a lofty air of dignity none of the servants ever succeeded in getting on familiar footing with him. He was constantly airing his superior wisdom and pompous manners before the other servants, and usually prefaced what he said with, "When I was a

boy in old Virginny." Nothing was quite so good as the doings of the "quality folks" in the "Old Dominion."

At mealtime he always stood in front of the broad mahogany sideboard, and on warm days he fanned away with a peacock feather fan any stray flies that ventured into the spotlessly clean dining-room. This fan was made broad and flat and was fastened to a long basket-weave handle, which was painted white. When it stood at rest in the corner of the dining-room next to the mahogany corner-cupboard, where there was an array of delft blue china, it was an ornament to the room.

Napoleon's curiosity was unbounded. He usually stood, with his cheek resting in the palm of his left hand, while his right kept the fan going, its long handle being tucked under his arm. When the conversation at the table reached a high pitch of interest the fan would drop lower and lower and finally stop altogether until it was discovered that the long feathers were tickling the nose of a guest, then he would jerk it up with a start and begin to fan imaginary flies vigorously. It was said that old Napoleon knew

more gossip, political and social, than any one in the whole county.

One day, after one of her periodical tiffs with Napoleon, Aunt Nora asked, "Brudder Jake, whut make Brudder Napoleon so straight up in de back, and so stiff in de neck jints?"

"Wall, Sis Nora," answered old Jake, with a grin, "I guess '*when he wuz a boy in ole Virginny*' he mus' er cotch de Greeshun ben' in de small er de back, an' dat keep him fum bein' soople lak us Alabama niggers."

When Mrs. Elmore sent Jerry to look for Napoleon he found him busily engaged in polishing the brass andirons. They agreed to meet that night and begin operations.

It was late in the afternoon when Sarah, the housegirl, went up to the barnyard to feed the fowls, and Mrs. Elmore, as was her habit, went to look over and count them, for her beautiful chickens were her pride. Sarah carried a pan from which she scattered the cornmeal dough in a long line up the barnyard drive. As the fowls lined up by the dozens on either side like two armies they were a pretty sight,—turkeys, Plymouth Rock and Brahma chickens, guineas, and ducks, all with their heads together, feeding.

Suddenly Mrs. Elmore threw up her hand and listened! Her face paled, and, without waiting for Sarah, she gathered her skirts and went hurrying to the house. At the garden gate she met Napoleon.

"The Yankees, Napoleon! I hear horses."

She rushed into the house, with Napoleon behind her. Hastily snatching a white counterpane from her bed, she spread it upon the floor, and handing Napoleon her keys, she cried, "Run for the silver." He was off to the dining-room in a flash, and soon returned bearing all the silver he could carry, which he poured onto the counterpane, and then ran back for more. Meanwhile Mrs. Elmore was hurriedly emptying trunks, jewel boxes, and bureau drawers of their treasures. At last Napoleon came, bearing the silver coffee urn and a carved silver tray, and said that they were the last. It had required but a few moments to accomplish all this. Quickly gathering up the four corners, Napoleon tied the counterpane securely just as he heard the horses galloping up through the grove.

"Where shall we hide it, Napoleon?" cried Mrs. Elmore, now thoroughly alarmed.

Napoleon scratched his head, then jumped into

the great open fireplace, and, placing his feet on the andirons, sprang up the chimney, pushing the bundle up, and fastening the long-handled shovel crosswise in such a manner that it would not fall. He then ran from the room and out toward the servants' quarters, covered with soot.

Mrs. Elmore walked calmly out to the front piazza. There a sight met her eyes that turned her fear into indignation. The Yankees, having torn down the bars of the barnyard fence, were mowing down the fowls with their swords like wheat. Headless chickens and turkeys were jumping about everywhere—many were picked alive and ran naked about the yard. After this wholesale destruction the men returned to their horses and rode away past the front steps down the curved driveway to the gate, only two or three having ventured into the house.

The last man that galloped by had a large turkey gobbler tied by the feet to the pommel of his saddle. It was fluttering and flapping and gobbling as the man rode. When he passed the piazza he called out to Mrs. Elmore mockingly, "Yes, Mr. Yank, you'll take the last turkey I've got!"

Mrs. Elmore's eyes flashed and her fists closed

tightly by her side. Just then the children, with Jerry, came running up from the spring.

"What did they do?" they cried in one breath.

Mrs. Elmore, with tears in her eyes, pointed to the barnyard.

"Gather them up, Jerry," she said. "We will put the negro boys on mules and send some to all our neighbors, and we will dress and use just as many as we can for our own table."

Jerry carried out her instructions, and people for many miles around feasted on turkeys, chickens, and ducks for several days afterward.

That night when the big house was quiet and the negroes in the quarters had ceased their dancing and singing, Napoleon knocked softly at the back hall-door. Mrs. Elmore opened it and admitted him. The cousins were packing a tin box with jewels, and Jerry was kneeling on the floor carefully wrapping each piece of silver in cloth and filling three wooden boxes.

"Oh, Jerry," said Mrs. Elmore, "we must hide them well, but I do not wish to know where you secrete them. If I should lose my coffee urn, 'twould grieve me indeed. It was my mother's and came with her from Virginia."

Jerry and Napoleon slipped softly out of the

house and down through the grove, Jerry carrying one box on his shoulder and the box of jewels under his arm, while Napoleon rolled the two larger boxes, together with a spade, in the wheelbarrow. On the two went with their burdens, down the road and into the woods back of the spring until they reached a very large chestnut tree. There they dug a deep hole and buried one of the boxes.

"What shall we do with this pile of dirt, Napoleon?" asked Jerry, when they had finished. "It will tell on us sure."

"Dat's whut I brung de wheelborry for," answered the old man wisely. "When you fills up a hole wid a box, you got to put de dirt sommers whut you dig out."

Filling the wheelbarrow, he rolled the dirt to a near-by thicket and emptied it into a deep gulch, saying that the rains would soon take all trace of it away. Then they made a circuit of the yard and entered the orchard. Going along under the trees nearest the fence, they came to a remote corner under an old horse-apple tree, the limbs of which were partly dead. Here they buried the second box, leaving the spot as near as possible like they found it. This was not hard to do, as

the ground had been freshly plowed close to the tree, and they threw the surplus dirt back into the furrows.

"Now," said Jerry, "this last large box we will carry over on the hill to the negro graveyard and bury it there."

"Naw, sir! Naw, sir, not me!" said Napoleon, backing away, his eyes rolling.

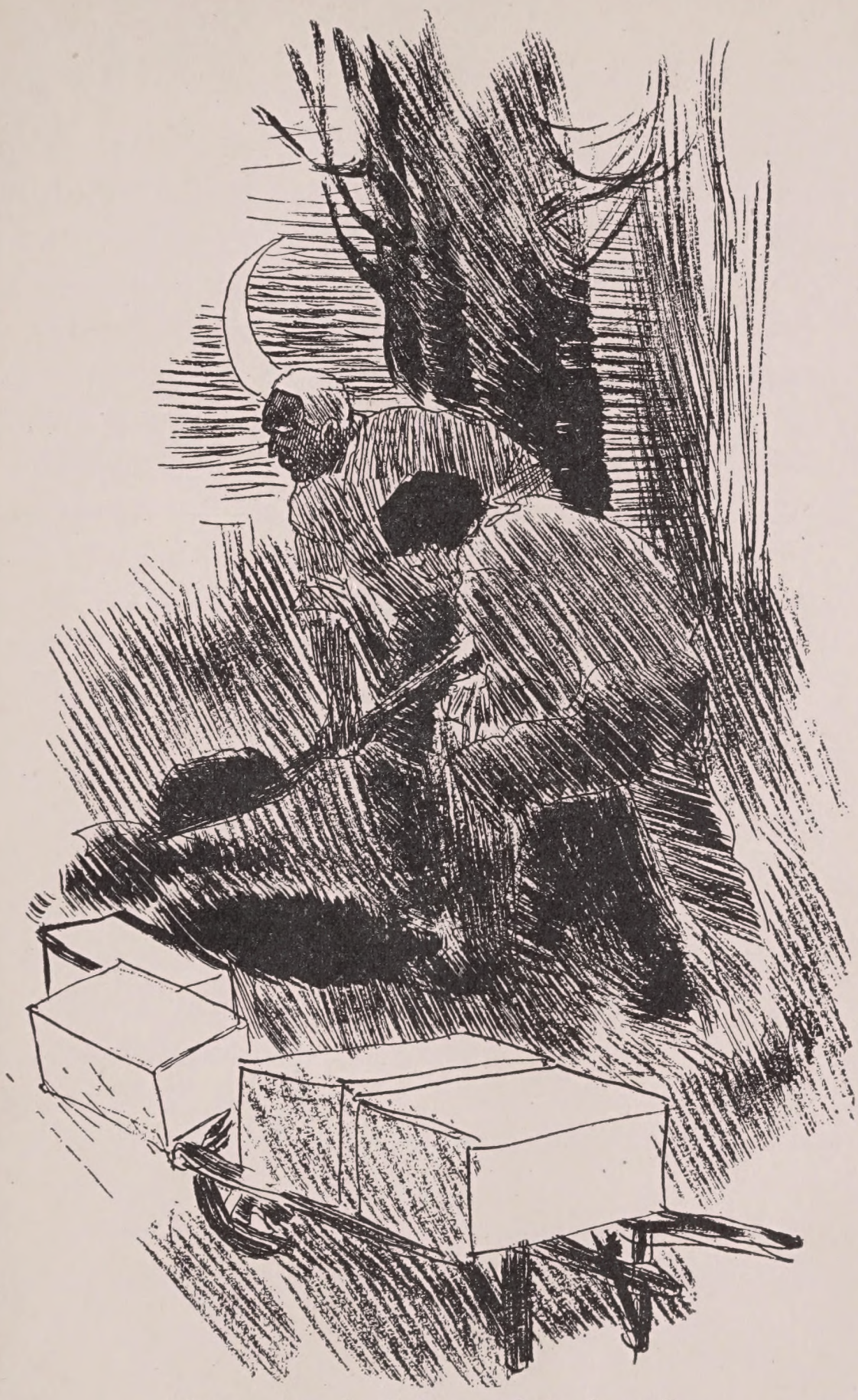
"Oh, come along, Napoleon," laughed Jerry, "don't be such an onion head. That's the finest place on earth to hide anything. Nobody would think of looking for it there."

"Naw-sir-ree!" Napoleon answered vehemently, "yer ain't gwine ter tole me inter nobody's graveyard atter de sun goes down."

"Well then," said Jerry impatiently, "I'll go by myself."

"I'll go up de lane as fur as de big gate whut goes inter de graveyard," compromised the old butler, "but dat's des' as fur as I gwine to 'spose myse'f," and, picking up his shovel, he followed Jerry, who had already entered the lane.

He lagged far behind though, and every few steps he paused to listen as if afraid to go farther. When Jerry reached the gate, Napoleon hurried



"There they buried one of the boxes"

up to open it for him, but in his fright and haste he forgot that it had to be lifted, or opened noiselessly, and he jerked it open with a loud, scraping, rasping noise that broke the solemn stillness.

"Great Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Jerry, "that was enough to awaken the dead and send their ghosts flying after you, Napoleon."

"Hush, Marse Jerry, I ain't got no sense 'bout a graveyard," he answered, and thrusting the shovel into the latter's hand he ran as fast as he could back an hundred yards and stood in the middle of the lane to see what disaster would befall Jerry.

Jerry soon buried the last box of silver and covered the place with leaves. Then he closed the gate softly and joined Napoleon, whose steps he could not keep pace with until they had once more entered the yard. Going to the house he crawled far up underneath the piazza to the dark interior of one of the chimneys. Here he dug a hole and deposited the jewels. When their work was finished, they put away their tools and knocking at the hall-door told Mrs. Elmore that her orders had been carried out.

Jerry's room was out in the yard and was connected with the house by a colonnade. Napoleon

walked across the yard with him. Just as they said "Good night" Jerry stopped suddenly and caught the old man by the arm. "Hush," he whispered, "what was that?" At the same time they both heard a door close softly in the quarters. Then the feeble light of a candle flared up, spluttered, and went out.

"Whose cabin is that, Napoleon?" asked Jerry.

"Dat's dat nocount nigger Irvine's!" he answered.

"Do you reckon he could have been spying on us to-night?" whispered Jerry.

"I dunno," said Napoleon. "De Debbil gwine ter sizzle dat nigger on er pitchfork yit. He allers prowlin' 'round tendin' ter somebody else's bizness." And the old darky shuffled off to his cabin, while Jerry retired to his bed to sleep.

The light burned long afterward in Mrs. Elmore's room. She was kneeling by the tall four-poster bed, praying for courage and strength to bear the coming trials of the war,—praying for her loved ones in battle and for the safety of her children at home.

CHAPTER IV

THE August sun blazed down on the earth, drawing quivering heat waves into the air, and scorching the fields of grain. The bees hummed drowsily in the clover while the cattle sought the shelter of the trees to doze and rest. Not a leaf stirred, and the stillness made the heat seem more intense.

A solitary horseman appeared, riding slowly down the dusty road on a horse that was jaded and drooping. The reins hung loosely on the animal's neck and the rider, with hands on the pommel of the saddle, leaned forward in the stirrups as if he were as tired as the horse. It was Dr. Murray, returning home from one of his cross-country trips to the bedside of a very ill patient, having ridden twenty miles, and having had little or no sleep for two nights previous. Such was the life of a country doctor in the 'sixties,—sleepless nights and long rides in all kinds of weather, over all kinds of roads.

Abruptly the stillness was broken by the clatter of another horse's hoofs and in a cloud of dust

another horseman appeared, riding like mad over the hill. As he came nearer, the doctor recognized the fat figure of Jonas Schmidt careening in the saddle.

"Hello, Doc!" he called, as he came jolting up. "I vas riding to your house. I vant you come queeck alreadty. My old 'oman took pad. She haf got a pad preaking out in der mouth, and, py Golly, I p'lieve she goin' die!"

The doctor sighed and looked toward the Schmidt farm five miles away, but visions of Jonas' wife, poisoned, or perhaps taking smallpox, and the sight of the Dutchman's anxious face made him hesitate no longer.

"I'll go, Jonas," he answered. "Aren't you coming, too?"

"No, I got some bizness ofer to Miss Elmore's. I pe right pack. Maype I ofertake you."

They parted, Jonas galloping on the main road, while the doctor rode as swiftly as his jaded horse could carry him toward the Schmidt place.

Riding up to the gate, he hurriedly dismounted and taking off his saddle-bags threw them over his arm and entered the porch. He was met at the door by Mrs. Schmidt herself, sleeves rolled up, and broom in hand. In his most professional

"Let me see your mouth, Mrs. Schmidt"

manner he walked up to her and ordered, "Let me see your mouth, Mrs. Schmidt," adjusting his glasses at the same time.

Mrs. Schmidt, plainly astonished, threw the broom aside and setting her hands on her hips demanded, "Who said dere vas anyting der matter wid my mouth?"

"Why," answered the patient doctor, "haven't you a breaking out in the mouth? I met your husband back on the high road, riding fast, coming after me. He said you were ill, and he was afraid you were going to die."

"Tinks I'm goin' to die, does he? Preaking out in der mouth! I'll teach him to play shokes on his unsuspectin' wife! I'll, I'll—" but her anger was so great that words failed her, and she turned back into the house.

In an instant the doctor awoke to the fact that he and Mrs. Schmidt were both the victims of one of Jonas' practical jokes. The whole situation flashed over him, and as he had a keen sense of humor the Dutchman's joke struck his funny-bone all in a heap. Falling into a chair, he forgot his late weariness and peal after peal of laughter shook the porch and awakened the house dog on the steps.

Mrs. Schmidt was almost spitting fire in her wrath. In the kitchen she was throwing pans around like a cyclone. Appearing again in the doorway, she waved a floor mop at the doctor.

"Get out of here!" she cried. "You and Jonas made up dot treek togedder. Don't you show your face here again. Preaking out in der mouth!"

The physician, scenting trouble, hurriedly took his hat and left, shaking with laughter. An hour later, riding homeward, he met Jonas, also riding homeward. When the Dutchman caught sight of the doctor a grin spread slowly over his face, and reining up his horse he asked, his hands in his trousers' pockets, "How much, Doctor?"

With a serious face, but with twinkling eyes, the doctor answered: "Ten dollars, Jonas. That breaking out is pretty bad; chronic, I think."

Jonas drew from a little pouch ten shining gold dollars and counted them into the doctor's hand. As he rode away the grin grew broader, and turning in his saddle he called to the doctor: "Dot vas alright, Doc. You tinks you vas got der shoke on me. I don't mind dot ten. It vas vorth it."

Darkness had settled over the hills when the

doctor rode through the driveway gate of his home. Throwing the reins to a negro boy, he went up the steps, still chuckling to himself.

CHAPTER V

ALL the morning the cousins and Mrs. Elmore had bustled about in a state of pleasant excitement, for they were preparing a box to send to Colonel Elmore. A message had come from a friend who was going back to the army after a furlough, assuring them of its safe delivery. Into this box were put a generous supply of home-knit socks, underwear, and home-made shirts, not only for the colonel but also for other needy soldiers. Rolls of bandages, made from strips of old soft cloth or linen, and many other necessities and comforts were also put in, together with packages for friends and favorite cousins in the regiment.

About two o'clock in the afternoon a small squad of Federal soldiers came riding by. The captain dismounted and asked Mrs. Elmore the direction to the spring, in order that his men and horses might refresh themselves. She pointed it out to him, and soon all the soldiers were lying in the shade of the trees resting.

Bessie, who was playing near-by, noticed a commotion in one of the martin boxes, which were

"Do not be alarmed, Madam"

placed on the tops of tall, stout poles set at intervals along the lane to the spring. The birds seemed greatly frightened and they chirped and fluttered, circling, 'round and 'round their houses. Bessie's curiosity got the better of her and forgetting all previous admonitions she decided to see what the disturbance was. Climbing hand over hand like a monkey on the cross-pieces nailed short distances apart on the pole, she was soon at the top and was just in the act of peering in, when a large snake raised itself from the dark interior and darted its head out the opening almost in her very face. With a scream, she loosened her hold and fell to the ground in a heap. A few minutes later Mrs. Elmore was horrified at the sight of the young Yankee captain bringing her up the steps in his arms.

"Do not be alarmed, madam," he called, "she has only fainted. See, she is coming to herself. She fell from one of the martin boxes."

He laid her on a lounge, and while her grandmother was feeling for broken bones he hurried for water and a towel and began bathing her face. The cousins came running down-stairs, and were much astonished to see a handsome young Yankee officer bending over little Bessie and making him-

self very much at home. At that moment Bessie opened her eyes and looking around said slowly, "I'll bet there's a snake in that martin box down yonder!"

Every one laughed, for that explained what had happened.

The captain stepped to the door and calling some of his men up from the spring told them about the snake in the bird's box. One fat Irishman tried pelting the box with stones to make the snake come out, but he couldn't hit the side of a church, so he gave up in disgust. Then he found a long reed fishing-pole and with this he poked inside the box until the snake leaned far out. As it did so, another soldier shot its head off and the snake fell to the ground.

"Faith and be jabbers!" cried the Irishman, "Oi'm sorry for the Johnnies you shoot at!"

But before he got the words out of his mouth a queer thing happened. The snake as it fell to the ground kept running, although its head was entirely severed from its body. The soldiers scattered in affright, and the fat Irishman rolled over and over in his excitement, crossing himself as he went. It was the funniest thing imaginable. The tail of the snake wiggled off in some under-

brush in the fence corner, while the head continued to run about for some moments as if seeking a place to hide, until finally it too ran under a heap of logs and died.

"Well, and phwat dy ye think of thot?" puffed the Irishman. "Thot snake was hoodooed!" And he got up, shaking the dirt and trash from his hair and clothes.

Mrs. Elmore then asked the captain if he could not leave her a guard, as she had received a message that a squad of soldiers, said to be raiders, would reach them at any time. He at once proposed that he and his men remain with them till nightfall. Then he went down to the spring grove and ordered his soldiers up to the yard, where he placed two sentinels on duty at the driveway gate and others at other points where the raiders might gain an entrance.

Sure enough, about an hour afterward, toward the middle of the afternoon, there rode up to the gate a party of raiders. As some of them dismounted they were met by the guards, who ordered them to move on, and they dared not disobey, for they did not know from whom the guards were receiving orders nor whose property they were guarding. After a time another de-

tachment passed and they too halted, but were commanded by the sentinels to keep moving. They showed very plainly that they were raiders, for many and varied were the articles hanging from their saddles, among which were a heavy silver waiter and a large carved teapot. Not even being allowed to stop for water they rode away, sullen and angry.

After this the captain, with two or three soldiers, came into the piazza and asked the cousins to play and sing something for them. Lucy indignantly refused. Fannie, too, hesitated—she wasn't quite certain as to the etiquette concerning Southern girls and Yankee soldiers. But Ala, who possessed a mischievous spirit and a good voice too, went into the parlor and soon the martial song "Dixie" rang out to the listening Yankees. They laughed at her daring, for she sang it well, too. When she had finished they asked for "Yankee Doodle." Instead she sang "The Bonnie Blue Flag." In vain they pleaded, but each time when asked she sang her own selection, —some Southern air. Finally she compromised by playing some rollicking music, such as "Come Haste to the Wedding" and "The Bad Man's Dream," and by singing several of her favorite

songs,—"Sleeping I dream, Love," "Fairy Belle," and "Molly Darling."

The shadows were lengthening down in the grove when the captain told Mrs. Elmore that they would have to ride on in order to join their company. She would not hear of their going, however, until she could show her appreciation by sending trays of hot coffee, fresh biscuit, and broiled ham to the soldiers.

As they mounted their horses the young captain lingered behind to exchange a word with Fannie, who had scarcely spoken the whole afternoon.

"I know that you sing," he said. "You look like you do, and I expect to hear you some day."

"Why," she exclaimed, a trifle haughtily, "I never expect to see you again!"

"That remains to be proved," he answered, and raising his cap he swung into the saddle and rode away.

CHAPTER VI

IT was the day of Hallowe'en, and Ben's friend, Albert Murray, had come to spend the day and night with him. In the afternoon the boys went hunting, taking Barney along to "side-tree" the squirrels. It is a most provoking thing to have a squirrel play hide and seek with one in the branches of a tree. Just as one is taking careful aim he will run around to the opposite side of the tree, and he will keep up this kind of a game an entire afternoon until the hunter's patience is exhausted. Barney's office was to stand on one side of the tree and scare the squirrels around. The little fellow felt his importance very much at being allowed to go hunting with the older boys.

Bessie went for a jaunt in the woods with the cousins to gather chestnuts and scaly-bark nuts. It was a perfect autumn afternoon. They crossed fields edged with masses of goldenrod and purple asters, and the marsh lands were strewn with little fringed gentians "colored with heaven's own blue." A merry chorus of crickets sounded lazily from amid the brown stubble, while myr-

iads of grasshoppers, "the little old men of the meadows," scattered from their path. When they entered the forest the continued sound of falling leaves was heard on every side,—all the trees,—the birch, the oak, the hickory, the poplar, and the gum,—were showering down their wealth of red and brown and gold, until the earth resembled a gorgeous Persian carpet. The frost fairy had touched the chestnut and beechnut burrs, and they were opening wide their stores and even spilling their brown nuts on the ground.

Bessie and the cousins flitted about, filling their baskets and crushing and opening the burrs with stones. In some places the ground around a bare old hickory tree would be strewn almost white with thin-skinned scaly-bark nuts, already shaken from their black shells. Once Bessie jumped and squealed as a hasty little chipmunk, in his brown and yellow striped coat, darted almost under her very nose and went down in his hole beneath the trunk of an old dead tree.

They started for home just as the sun was setting, their baskets heavy with nuts and their arms filled with wild flowers, autumn leaves, and wild grapes. As they crossed the fields flights of swallows going farther south dipped and circled above

them, and the sound of bells came across the meadow as the cows were being driven home. It was late,—fully supper time,—when the boys returned, and Bessie ran eagerly to meet them. Ben was carrying some large object in his arms.

"Here's a present we have brought you, Bessie," he called to her.

Delighted, she held out her arms for it. It was a tiny baby deer, which they had found wounded in the forest. Barney's eyes looked on wistfully as they crowded around their grandmother, telling her how they had found the little creature so helpless and frightened, but he was a generous, unselfish little boy and very magnanimously allowed his twin to have the deer.

His grandmother, noticing him, said gently, "And Barney shall have a pet, too."

"I tell you, Mistiss," said Old Jake, "give Barney dat little yoke er steers whut I fotch down yistiddy. Dey sho is good matches, an' he kin break dem hisse'f."

"That's a very happy suggestion, Jake," replied Mrs. Elmore. "Barney, would you like that?"

"Oh yes, grandmother," he cried gladly, "I would like that best of all."

"Warm milk from a spoon like a baby"

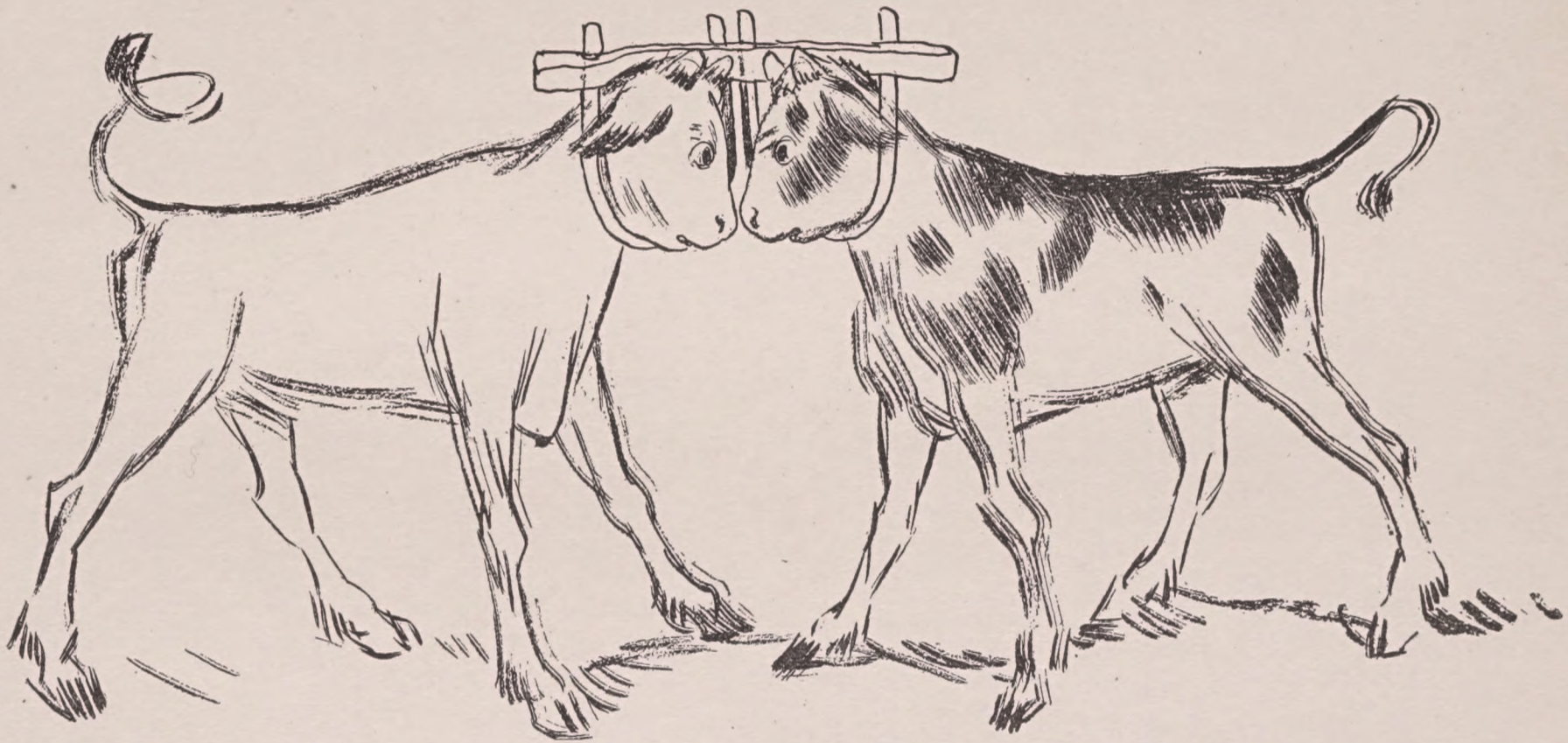
So it was agreed that Barney should have the little pair of oxen for his own. Then he and Bessie hurried away to the kitchen with the baby deer to see if they could induce it to drink some warm milk, which they found it would take from a spoon like a baby. After their grandmother had dressed its wound they made it a comfortable bed in the wood-house; then they went in to their supper. The boys' squirrels made a savory stew and, with honey and beaten biscuits for supper, they felt that they were very rich, indeed, considering they were children of the Confederacy.

After supper they spent the evening roasting apples and boiling chestnuts, and their grandmother and the cousins assisted. A kettle of salted water was placed over the log fire in the dining-room. As it began boiling the chestnuts were dropped in, and when they were done, poured out on a platter, and cooled, they were delicious. The cousins tested their fortunes by naming chestnuts after their absent soldier sweethearts and roasting them over the fire in the long brass-handled shovels. When a chestnut popped off the shovel into the fire his namesake was pronounced false and fickle indeed. At last, tired and happy, they kissed their grandmother good night and

each, with his lighted candle, went up the stairs to bed.

The next morning, almost at the peep of day, the twins were up and dressed, for Barney wished to break his steers and Bessie to see her pet once more. Barney aroused Flem and together they ran to the barnyard and brought out the calves, while Bessie perched herself on the horse block, with the little deer in her arms, to watch the proceedings.

The boys soon fitted the small steers with a solid wooden yoke kept for the purpose. Tying a rope to the yoke near the outside horn of each calf they began the exciting task. The calves started off briskly at first, but soon they began to gallop, and it was all the boys could do to keep pace with them. Finally the ropes were jerked out of the boys' hands and they found themselves sitting in the middle of the road, gazing after their disappearing team. After running a short distance the steers stopped and separated as far as possible, turning their heads as near together as the wooden yoke would allow and calmly gazing into each other's eyes. Nor did they appear to be anything but docile when the boys, springing to their feet, ran up and caught them.



"Calmly gazing into each other's eyes"

Suddenly a happy thought struck Flem.

"Let's tie dey tails togedder," he suggested.

"All right!" said Barney.

And they did tie their tails hard and fast together. Then each boy taking a rope, they cracked their whips and here they came, calves and boys, flying down the road. Bessie waved her arms and cheered as they dashed past her.

"Hold on, Flem, hold on!" shouted Barney, who was himself touching the ground in spots.

But it was plainly seen that the young steers were running away—they were gaining speed with every breath. At last the ropes flew out of the boys' hands and they went spinning and rolling in the dust. Faster and faster went the calves.

Down the road a few yards stood a wagon-shelter, and the calves seemed making straight for it. They reached it at topmost speed, the center of the wooden yoke striking one of the tall corner posts, which split the yoke wide open. Of course when the post reached the tails something had to break there too; and it did. With a sound like the crack of a whip, the calves were free and speeding on in their mad career.

"Lordy! I believe dey broke dey tails off!" shouted Flem, his eyes rolling.

Both boys and Bessie ran toward the house and at the gate they met old Jake coming out to see what the excitement was. He was an angry darky when he found that they had lost the calves. Hurrying back to the stables, he mounted a horse and started in search of the runaways.

The family had finished breakfast and were all sitting on the front piazza when they saw him returning with the calves. As he came closer a shout of laughter went up from the group on the porch, for one steer walked by, bellowing and indignant, wearing two tails tied together, the wrong end of one trailing in the dust, and the other stalked along in sullen silence, for he had not the suspicion of a tail in the place where a tail ought to be.

CHAPTER VII

THE morning was crispy cold. Jack Frost was everywhere nipping toes and fingers, ears and noses, and leaving them numb and red as cherries. Jerry came swinging along, his heavy boots crunching the hard frozen ground. He was trying to balance a pail of milk on his head and whistle "The Mocking-Bird" at the same time, but it wouldn't work, for Jerry had a funny way of wriggling his head as he whistled, to keep time. Then it wasn't the proper time to be whistling mocking-bird tunes anyway—anybody in Dixie but Jerry would have known that.

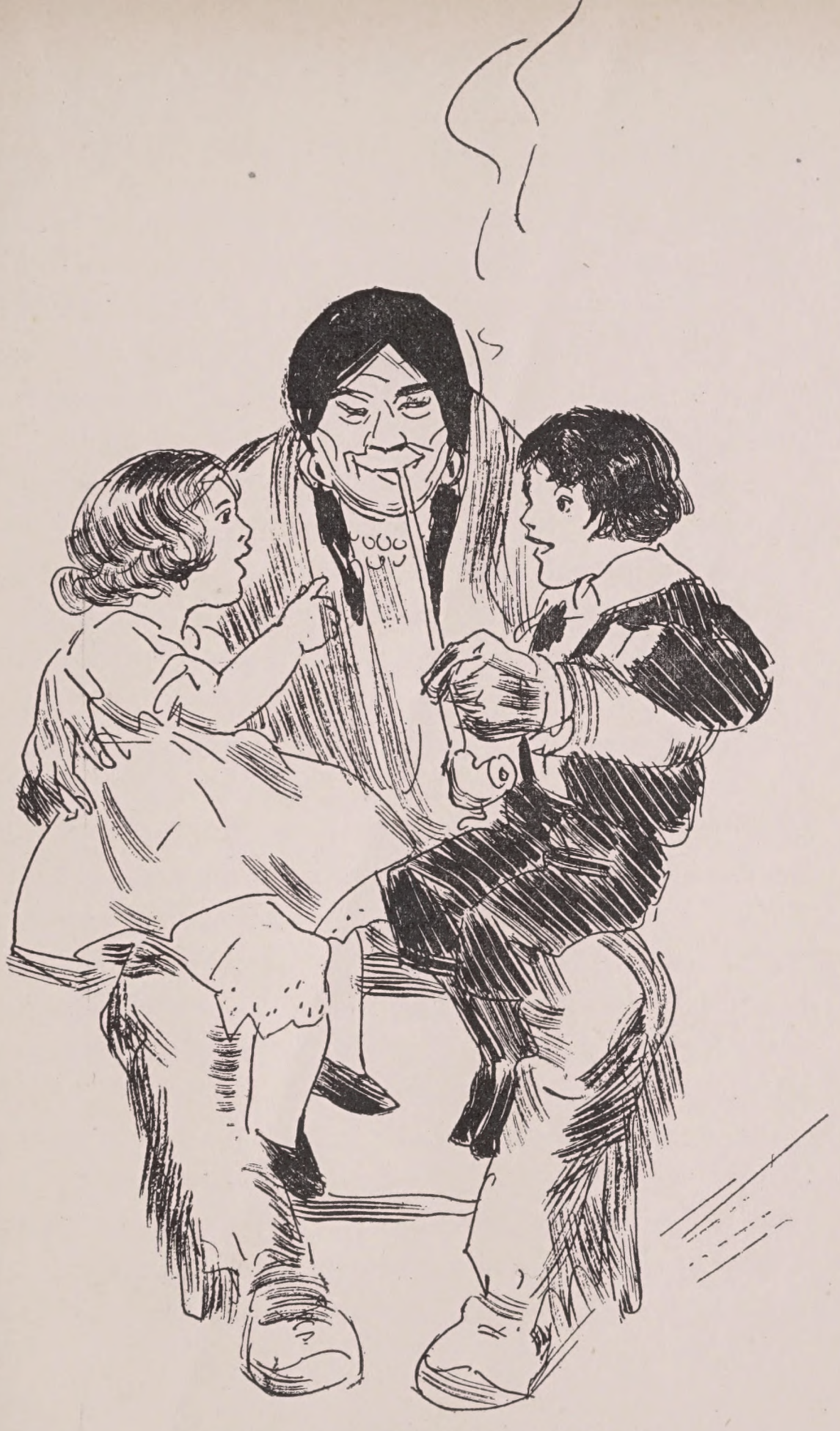
It isn't funny when it is cold in the Southland, for the people are not accustomed to severe weather, and that morning all the family were around the blazing log fires in the sitting-room and in the dining-room. Wood was one of the few things that they did not have to economize in. Meat and bread might be lacking, but when the few very cold days came they could luxuriate in the warmth of a cherry log fire to their hearts' content.

As Jerry entered the big kitchen the smell of frying sausage greeted him, and he gave a shout of joy as he set down the milk pails. He knew what that meant—the fall hog killing was in progress.

Disappearing around the house he ran up to the barnyard, where a number of negroes were engaged in the work of preparing the meat for the smoke-house. Fully twenty large pigs were hanging suspended from rods under the trees and kettles of boiling water stood near-by. Some of the men were scalding and scraping the pigs until each one was clean and white, while others were at a long platform cutting and assorting the meat. Negro women were passing to and fro bearing great pans of fat toward the kitchen to be boiled down and made into lard. Barney and Bessie were dancing about on their toes to keep warm and playing tag in every one's way.

Ben, who was turning the handle of a big sausage grinder, called to Jerry to take his place, for he saw Jonas Schmidt riding toward the gate.

As the children ran to meet Jonas, he called out: "Py Golly! I p'lieve effery pody iss makin' sausage to-day. Der porkers iss hangin' high at effery pody's place I passed. Pol and me kilt



"They made a pretty picture indeed"

all we had yesterday. Tell you, though, you petter look out. Der Yankees vill eat dose sausages already yet."

"They'll get it over my dead body, if they do," exclaimed Ben defiantly.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Dutchman, "Polly says she'll purn der shmoke-house down fust."

As he rode away the breakfast bell rang and the children scampered to the house. What a breakfast it was! Fresh pork chops, sausage, crackling bread, lye hominy, and corn cakes,—just a sample of the extravagance of a southern planter's family that had not yet been seriously affected by the war.

As the others were leaving the dining-room Jerry came in for his breakfast, his face rosy from recent ablutions with cold water.

"Mrs. Elmore," he said, "old Chineabee is out in the barnyard. He's been sitting on a stump out there watching the men all the time you all were eating, and he hasn't spoken a word since he came."

"Poor fellow," replied Mrs. Elmore, "he is lonely, I imagine. Run, Barney, and tell him to come to the kitchen and have some warm breakfast." As the twins ran away, glad to do her

bidding, she continued, "I sometimes think the old man gets homesick for the companionship of his own people."

Soon the children returned with old Chineabee, to whom they gave a chair by the kitchen fire, and then they ran to get him a cup of hot coffee and a plate of breakfast. The Indian thawed out wonderfully under the kindness of his pets, and when he had finished eating he lighted his long pipe, while both children climbed to his lap, talking like magpies. Later, when their grandmother came in to speak some cheering words to the old chief, she thought that they made a pretty picture indeed.

The following days were busy ones. All the meat was cured with sorghum, pepper, and saltpeter, then it was suspended from the ceiling of the long smoke-house. Low fires of ash and hickory wood were built on the dirt floor, and the meat was thoroughly smoked to preserve it for the winter. What an array there was of hams, bacon, ribs, and of long, narrow bags of sausage, barrels of crackling, and cans of lard.

Early one morning a few days later a boy about fourteen years old galloped up to the gate and asked for Mrs. Elmore. His horse was wet with

foam, for he had ridden a long way from one of the upper plantations.

"The Yankees are headed this way," he called. "They are now at Johnson's ford. They are raiders, too, so you had better hide anything of value."

Mrs. Elmore thanked him and noticing his tired horse urged him to take "Firefly" and leave his own to rest until his return. This the boy gladly consented to do. Uncle Jake was called, and the exchange was quickly made. Doffing his hat, the young Paul Revere was off and galloping down the road to warn the next plantation.

Hastily summoning Jerry and calling Ben and the cousins in consultation, Mrs. Elmore said: "What shall we do? I do so hate to see all our winter's supply of meat taken."

Jerry suggested that they fill a wagon with the greater part of the meat and let him drive it far into the woods. This plan was thought wise and was hastily carried out, but very quietly, in order that the negroes might suspect nothing. The wagon,—a large new one,—was filled with the choicest hams and bacon, and one barrel of molasses was put in. Then four of the finest mules were hitched to the wagon, and Jerry drove away by a back road toward the forest.

But one pair of eyes was watching. The negro Irvine was peering through a crack in the gear and saddle-house. He had heard the rider approach, and had hastened down from the woodyard where he was at work to see if he could hear anything of consequence. As soon as the wagon had gone he slipped back to the woodyard, climbed to the top of the fence, and, shading his eyes with his hand, watched the disappearing wagon as far as he could see.

Ben and the twins stayed near their grandmother all morning, fearing they knew not what. Old Jake carried all the best horses and mules to a ravine back of the spring and tied them there, leaving them a plenty of food.

About noon the family heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the upper road coming nearer and nearer. Almost before they realized it the house was filled with Yankees. They were only a small detachment, however. But they ran up-stairs and down, devoured everything eatable, then hurried to the smoke-house. Disappointed at finding so little meat there they began to question the negroes, many of whom had run in, frightened and excited.

Seeing Irvine in the center of a group of soldiers and noticing that he was talking fast and pointing toward the woods back of the house, Ben whispered quickly to his grandmother that the negro had betrayed them. There was conclusive evidence of the fact when the Yankees mounted their horses and all rode hurriedly up the back road.

The children had never seen Mrs. Elmore so agitated. She was greatly grieved to think that the traitor should be Irvine, whose life she had saved when he was a child, by tending him and giving him medicine. And when a tottering babe he had fallen into the fire and had been severely burned hers had been the hand that had dressed his wounds. Even now that he was a man she, knowing that he was not strong, had always given him light work near the house rather than let him go into the fields. And thus she was repaid.

Jerry, who had been near the edge of the woods watching every movement of the Yankees, realized that his hiding-place was discovered. He had hidden the wagon in a jungle of pines and tangled vines, but he knew that if they persisted in riding deep into the forest, they would be sure to find

it. So he ran with all his might back into the jungle and quickly cut the traces. Jumping on the back of one of the mules and driving the others he rode to a gorge some distance farther into the forest, where they were completely hidden by the overhanging vines and other undergrowth.

"They may have the wagon and provisions, but they sha'n't have four of the finest mules in Alabama,—not if I can help it," he muttered.

He had barely gotten away when the raiders rode up and discovered the wagon. They were angry men when they saw that they could not remove that heavy wagon out of the forest.

Some of them set out in pursuit of the person who had run with the horses, or mules, that had brought it there. For some time they galloped about in all directions. Jerry could hear them right above his head, and he softly patted each mule over and over in turn to keep them from nickering.

Finally, in desperation, the Yankees returned to the wagon, and after a time Jerry saw flames and smoke darting up through the trees. Chagrined in being defeated they had built a fire under the wagon and now it was a blazing bonfire.

About an hour later when Jerry very sorrowfully led the four mules toward home they passed the blackened heap of ashes and the rims of wheels where the loaded wagon had stood.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next morning after breakfast Mrs. Elmore sent for Irvine. As he came shuffling up she could not find voice at first to speak to him, but when she could sufficiently control herself she said: "Irvine, you have betrayed your best friends. You are a leper among the other servants. Go. You may have your freedom. Take all your clothes and have Nora prepare for you enough to eat for two days. Don't ever set foot on this plantation again. Our troubles are on us now; yours will come soon enough. Don't let me find you here after the clock strikes twelve."

Astonished, the ingrate turned, without a word, toward his cabin. An hour later he was seen walking briskly down the cross-road to join the Yankee camps some miles away.

The other negroes were greatly awed over the dismissal of Irvine, and they talked in subdued voices at their work,—all but Flem and Nero, the stable boys, who gave vent to their relief at the riddance by turning handsprings and cart-wheels and singing lustily:

"Go, you may have your freedom"

"Run, nigger, run, de patterole 'll ketch yer.
"Run, nigger, run, hit's almost day."

Not one of them envied Irvine his freedom—they all talked of "Old Miss's" kindness to him in past years and of the wise course she had pursued in sending him away. But at intervals through the day, from the top of the woodpile, Flem could be heard singing:

"De nigger run, de nigger flew,
"De nigger tore his shirt in two,"—

and Nero at the spring, or somewhere else on the plantation, would answer like an echo:

"Run, nigger, run, de patterole 'll ketch yer,
"Run, nigger, run, hit's almost day."

Barney and Bessie darted in and out of the kitchen behind Aunt Nora, who was busy making side-pies of stewed dried peaches, and the old negro's voice could be heard threatening them with "Raw Hide and Bloody Bones," while they protested, "But, Mammy Nora, you gave Ben two turn-over pies, and you didn't give us but one."

"Well, here den, you rapscallions you! Doan' you come back here ergin 'fore supper." As they ran away Aunt Nora went back to her work filling and turning over the pastry and pressing down and fluting the edges with a fork.

Uncle Jake, who had come in from the workhouse and stood leaning against the door-facing, said, "Ain't you jest a leetle hard on dem chillun, Sis Nora?"

"Hard? Hard? Who dat 'scusin' me er bein' hard on Miss Virginny's chilluns?" Here she lowered her voice to a solemn pitch and spoke in funereal tones. "I drempt las' night, Brudder Jake, I had one dem visionaries."

"Is dat so?" answered the latter, greatly interested.

Dilcie came in just then, with the dish-cloth on her arm, and paused to listen, for Aunt Nora's dreams occasionally took weird and wonderful shapes.

She waited until she had put the pies in the oven, then she began impressively: "Hit wuz endurin' uv Christmas 'bout three year ago I had dis same dream. I seed Miss Virginny den an' I seed her ergin las' night. I seed her a long ways off a-comin' froo de clouds. Dey parted an' roll

up ter one side lak de waters uv de Jordan did fer dem pore tired chillun er Israel,—an' here she come er-riden', er-riden' on er great white hoss. An' dey was bofe er-shinen' like de sun. De hoss's big wings wuz er-flappen' an' er-flappen' an' he wuz er-breathin' smoke frum his nostruls. Every time his hoofs hit de groun' dey strike de fire in er blaze like er blacksmif. An' Miss Virginny call ter me, 'Nora, Nora, take kere uv my little chillun!' "

"Lordy!" said Dilcie, "you wuz cunjered"; but Aunt Nora paid no attention to this interruption. Rocking herself back and forth in her straight chair, she folded her arms and resumed:

"Dar I lay an' shivered an' shuck. All de kink come out er my hair an' de cole sweat bust out all over me. Jes' den I look froo de winder an' see de full moon lookin' at me. An' den de moon 'gun ter move an' hit come right in froo de winder."

"Oh, Lordy," moaned Dilcie, and she threw her apron over her head, while Jake stopped smoking and stood rapt and open-mouthed, listening.

Aunt Nora continued her story, still crooning and rocking her body:

"De moon come an' sot right up on de head er

my bed, an' he sez to me, sezze, 'Nora, Nora, take kere er dem motherless chillun,' an' den he riz slow lak, he did, an' sailed away on up whar he come frum."

Uncle Jake breathed a heavy, groaning sigh of relief, Aunt Nora suddenly stopped rocking and ran to the oven,—just in time, for the pies were a delicious brown and one minute more would have ruined them,—and Dilcie took her apron from over her head and gasped, "You wuz cunjered sho'!"

"Who dat say I'se cunjered?—Me?" cried Aunt Nora, whirling around and opening her homespun dress at the throat to display a rabbit foot hung from a red flannel string. "Does yer know whut dat is? Dat's de lef hine foot uv er rabbit whut wuz kilt in er graveyard whilst hit wuz dancin' on old Major Hilton's grave, an' dey ain't nuthin' kin cunjer me whilst I got dat on my pusson."

As she stacked the pies pig-pen fashion on a platter, she continued vigorously: "An', Brudder Jake, I'se a-gwine ter take kere uv dem chillun jes' as long as dis ole nigger got bref. But I ain't gwine ter stan' fer dem gallervatin' all over de place en' er argerfyin' wid me,—now dar!"

Dilcie hurried to the dining-room and Uncle Jake to his work. Soon Aunt Nora was heard singing, "Nora, Nora, opan de winder, let de dove come in."

CHAPTER IX

"AT der sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee,
"On den, Chreestian soldiers, on to victory!"

The voice rang out clear and full, for 'twas Mrs. Schmidt, singing at her ironng. Every third or fourth word was punctuated and emphasized by a thud of the hot iron as she planted it firmly here and there, with a vigor that would have augured ill indeed for the king of the nether world himself, had he chosen to appear just then.

Mr. Schmidt lay sleeping under his own vine and fig tree, metaphorically speaking, for in this instance the fig tree was his cozy kitchen. Stretched full length on a rug before the fire, his head and shoulders reclining on a pillow laid over the back of a turned-down chair, his noisy snoring proclaimed his enjoyment of this his favorite attitude.

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand," sang Mrs. Schmidt, "and cast,—mien gracious, Sambo! vat's der matter," The tiniest little negro, trembling in every limb, stood on the threshold.

"De Yankees! De Yankees!" he gasped, "Dey's comin' down de road."

Turning, Mrs. Schmidt ran to her husband and, shaking him roughly, cried: "Der Yankees, Der Yankees! Jonas, wake up!" But Jonas only stopped snoring and fell off the chair dead asleep. "Wake up, wake up, you idiot!" she screamed, and, turning to the water bucket on a shelf near the door, she caught up a dipper of cold water and dashed it over his face.

Jonas got to his feet, spluttering and quarreling, "Py Golly! vat der you take me for, ole 'oman,— a salamander or a Baptist?"

"Der Yankees vill take you for a prisoner if you don't fly," cried his wife. "Dey'r comin', Jonas. Run, run to der woods!"

Jonas, now thoroughly awake, needed no further urging, but was out the door in a twinkling and running through the orchard toward the woods. But he had started too late. The soldiers, galloping down the road, espied the "flying Dutchman," and instantly a yell went up from among them. Tearing down the rail fence, they put spurs to their horses and rode in swift pursuit. "Halt!" they cried, "Halt!" But Schmidt's feet seemed to take wings. "Snip! Bang!" went

two bullets close to his ear. "Whiz! Bang!" sang another and another. With a mighty effort the Dutchman vaulted the rail fence at the edge of the forest and in an instant he was lost to view in the woods. On he ran, just as the soldiers reached the fence. But they lost time in tearing down the rails, and the fugitive gained on them. He was almost exhausted, however, for you must remember that Jonas was fat and had no wind to spare.

"Lie down, Jonas, lie down," spoke a voice right at his feet, as if it came out of the ground, and Jonas, seeing a big brown log, fell beside it and crouched down in the dry leaves as close to it as possible, wishing with all his might for a miracle that would turn him into a lizard or a snake. Hearing no Yankees, he opened one eye cautiously and peeped out, and there lying almost under another log near-by was old Deacon Jones.

"Py Golly! Py Golly!" ejaculated Jonas, panting, his teeth chattering. "Dat vas a close shave. Dem pullets played marples all ofer my coat-tails."

"Hush, don't speak," whispered the deacon.

His warning came none too soon, for a footfall was heard right at them and a soldier ran by,

"The Dutchman vaulted the rail fence"

searching eagerly, looking behind every large tree. Jonas' heart nearly stopped beating and his hair almost stood on end as the Yankee stepped right over the log under which he was lying. Surely he must see him, if he looked down. But the soldier was in a hurry and looked straight ahead. Finally he gave up the search and turned back toward the others, who had started to the house.

When he had disappeared, both men raised their heads cautiously and looked toward the house. The blue coats were running in and out like ants, and Mrs. Schmidt was standing in the yard, with arms folded, grimly looking on, too full of anger for utterance.

Some one passed the word along, and in a moment the whole squad started in a body for the smoke-house. Finding the door locked, they demanded the key of Mrs. Schmidt and she, knowing resistance to be useless, handed it over, without a word. When the last man had entered the smoke-house Mrs. Schmidt, unnoticed, stepped quietly in behind him.

A few red coals were still glowing on the dirt floor, left there from the smoking of the meat a few days before, and in one corner was an inverted barrel, on the top of which lay some scat-

tered pods of red pepper. Edging stealthily over to this corner, Mrs. Schmidt raked up a double handful of peppers and put them upon the burning coals, then stepping quickly out of the door, she closed and locked it.

Running to the ash-hopper under the fig trees, some distance away, she climbed over into it and lay on top of the ashes, peering through a crack in the plank, convulsed with laughter.

Soon a mighty commotion began in the smoke-house, increasing in violence louder and louder, until the din sounded like the roaring of lions. The men were coughing, sneezing, and yelling, and they were fighting and pounding on the door like mad. The smoke-house was tightly built, and the door was a stout one of solid plank. Soon a nose was poked through a knot-hole in the door for a breath of fresh air, and this was succeeded by another and another in turn,—fat noses, toothpick noses, long noses, short noses, and Roman noses,—as their owners fought for a place.

Mrs. Schmidt rolled in the ash-hopper, hugging herself in ecstasy. She had never had so much fun in all her life.

Suddenly the door burst from its fastenings and the men rolled out pell-mell into the yard, cough-

ing and cursing. With vengeance in their hearts, they searched the house and the yard and the cellar and the attic, but they could not find the object of their wrath. Then mounting their horses, they all galloped down the road, sneezing and coughing, and with tears streaming from their eyes.

Some time afterward Mrs. Schmidt climbed cautiously out of the ash-hopper. Very much dishéveled, and with cramped limbs, she entered one door of the kitchen just as Jonas, wild-eyed and frightened, tiptoed softly in through the other.

CHAPTER X

BEN had never been on a deer-hunt in his life, and this kind of a hunt, a night hunt, appealed to him in many ways. He looked forward with pleasure to the fun of camping out all night and of carrying a basket of good things to eat, for, when an excursion of any kind was to be taken, there were always ham sandwiches, boiled eggs, fried chicken, gingercake, and jam tarts,—one could count on these things. But to carry his grandfather's gun, a double-barreled shotgun, was the crowning joy. Uncle Jake was to accompany him, and Ben's grandmother had admonished the old man many times to take good care of Ben,—to let no accident happen with that gun,—just as all good grandmothers do.

They started just at sundown, walking across the orchard toward the forest beyond. Ben carried the tallow-dip lantern, the lunch basket, and the gun, while Uncle Jake shouldered his own musket, an ax, and a shovel. As they passed under the trees Ben gathered enough juicy fall apples to fill the pockets of his jacket.

When they reached the fence he was about to climb over as usual, when Uncle Jake yelled at him: "Here, boy! You see I'se lettin' down dese bars. Doan' you go clamberin' over dat fence wid dat gun. Didn't old Mistiss tell me to be keerful 'bout dat gun er de Cunnel's?"

Obeying good-naturedly, Ben went whistling through the autumn woods. The trees seemed aflame in their dress of scarlet and gold, and the pungent smell of burning pine came from some spent forest fire beyond.

"I b'lieve de lick is long here sommers," said Uncle Jake, when they had gone about a mile, "fer I done knotched two post oaks a-growin' by a big white rock. Yes, dar hit is."

And sure enough a big white rock between two large trees formed one side of a leafy dell, where they decided to build their tent, as the line of salty soil, or rock, at which the deer came to lick, lay about fifty yards out in front. It was along the edge of a wet weather brook, and in the banks were hollows that had been worn away by the deer in the passing years. Uncle Jake had at different times facilitated matters by mixing a few handfuls of salt with the earth along the banks.

Cutting four stout forked poles, Uncle Jake

drove them into the ground, with the forks upward, across which they laid poles covered with tops of pine bushes and loose earth. On the top of this pile they built a fire of small pine-knots and bits of dry wood. Near-by they put fuel, to keep the fire going, which was to attract the attention of the deer, whose curiosity will cause them to seek out a light, no matter how distant. Uncle Jake knew all about deer-hunting.

The rude scaffold was hardly more than three feet high—not high enough for either of them to stand erect in, and the roof being low, the deer, blinded by the light of the fire, would not be able to discern the persons in the dark interior.

Uncle Jake and Ben crawled in, and, seating themselves comfortably cross-legged, Turkish fashion, opened their basket and ate their supper. When they had finished each laid his gun cocked across his knees and began his vigil of the night. For a while Ben strained his eyes down toward the lick, but no sound came from the darkness save the chirp of crickets and the hum of jar-flies and other insects. They dared not speak nor move oftener than necessary, for the ears of a deer can detect even the slightest sound. At intervals Uncle Jake would reach out and, carefully

lifting a knot of pine, would slowly ease it up to the fire above his head.

It seemed to Ben that three long hours must have passed when, on happening to glance toward Uncle Jake, he saw that his head had dropped forward on his breast and that he was fast asleep. Soon he began to snore gently, and Ben was aching to give him a kick.

Another hour passed while Uncle Jake continued to snore.

Suddenly a twig snapped loudly and Ben's heart almost stood still, for there, standing full in the light, gazing straight toward them, was a deer. It was a splendid one, and Ben felt that he could not shoot so magnificent a creature. Summoning all his strength, however, he noiselessly lifted his gun, took careful aim, and fired. The noise, vibrating through the silent forest, sounded like the boom of a cannon, after the long stillness.

"Lord-a-mercy!" yelled Uncle Jake, his cocked gun going off like an echo to Ben's.

Springing up in affright, he rammed his head right through the top of the tent, tearing it down, while the red coals, dirt, and pine branches tumbled about them in confusion. Ben quickly ex-

tricated himself, and, pulling out the lantern, lighted it just as Jake came kicking and spluttering from the other side.

"'Fo' de Lawd, Marse Ben! 'Fo' de Lawd! Whut's de matter?" he gasped.

"Matter?" answered Ben angrily, knocking the fire and ashes off his clothes. "Why you slept at your post, that's what you did, and when a big buck came up to the lick and I shot him you had a nightmare, that's what."

"Did de deer come?" exclaimed old Jake, his mouth dropping wide.

"Yes," answered Ben, "and I believe I hit him, although he turned and ran off down through the woods."

At that moment Ben set down the lantern and began to laugh. The woods echoed and re-echoed with peals of laughter. "Uncle Jake!" he gasped, "you are a sight. Both your coat-tails are gone,—burned off." And he went off into another fit of laughter, rolling on the ground in his merriment.

Jake pulled a very woebegone face, and felt for his coat-tails, beating the fire out with his hands.

"Dey sho is," he answered dolefully, "an' dis wuz my Sunday-go-ter-meetin' coat. Hannah

"Dar he is, Marse Ben!"

jes' would mek me war hit, kese she's feared I'd ketch cold."

"Well, come on, let's go hunt that deer," said Ben. "I know he must be wounded."

Swinging the lantern along in front, they began to search in the direction that the deer had taken in his mad flight.

"There's blood on the leaves, Uncle Jake, look!" exclaimed Ben.

And sure enough as they went along they could trace the deer's course by the blood-bespattered leaves, and they knew that he had been wounded at least. At length Jake, who was in the lead, jumped aside quickly with, "Dar he is, Marse Ben. Dar he is sho'!" And there, under a clump of bushes, lay the deer. Old Jake had almost run onto him in the darkness. Ben was almost beside himself with joy.

"How in the world will we get him home, Uncle Jake?" he said.

"I tell you what, Marse Ben," proposed Jake, "you stay here to g'yard de deer, an' I'll go home an' fotch ole Button, an' we'll let dis venison *ride* home."

Now, many boys of twelve would have been frightened at the thought of remaining alone in

the forest at night, but not Ben. His heart was full of pride and he felt himself growing greater every instant. He watched Uncle Jake trotting off with the lantern and wondered what they would say at home when he reached there with the news. Uncle Jake was almost as proud of Ben as the boy was of himself.

Ben remained at his post, still too full of exaltation to feel afraid. Passing his hands over the deer's antlers, he started back in alarm, for he thought he saw a perceptible movement of one of its legs. What if it should come to life and attack him? He had heard of such things. He ran his hand down his gun and cocked it. Well, let him move and start to rise, he would be ready for him. But the deer lay quite still.

After a while he saw the gleam of the lantern through the trees, and heard old Jake's familiar "Hello-o-o!" He put his hands to his mouth and answered with a "Whopee!"

Soon the old darky came up, leading Button, and together they lifted the deer to the back of the horse, and, strapping it securely, started for home, Uncle Jake walking by the side to hold the deer, and Ben leading Button and carrying the lantern. Any other horse in the stables would

have been frightened to bear such a burden, and no doubt would have run away; but Button had perfect confidence in Jake.

The whole household was up and astir when they reached home, although it was barely daybreak, and such a fuss they made over the size of the deer and over Ben's wonderful marksmanship. But Ben was waiting for one person in particular, and when he saw her hurrying down the steps he ran to her, and, throwing both arms around her, he cried: "Grandmother, grandmother, I did it! I did it with grandfather's gun!"

CHAPTER XI

JERRY sat in the window of his room enjoying the evening breeze. It was about nine o'clock, but the negroes in the quarters were making the night merry with their wild dancing and singing. They were not near enough to disturb the inmates of the big house, but now and then the twang of banjos and snatches of song could be clearly heard. Just now the voices came on the breeze:

"Ole Dan Tucker wuz er mean ole soul,
"He whipped his wife wid er fishen' pole.
"Clear de way fer ole Dan Tucker,
"You too late ter eat yo' supper."

The perfume of jessamine filled the air. How peaceful seemed the world so far from the scenes of battle. Before another balmy night dire tidings might come from the front, bringing sorrow to this happy Southern home.

All these thoughts were in Jerry's mind as he turned from the window to retire. When he leaned out to close the blinds the moon was be-

ginning to rise and through a broad gap in the trees on the hill it shone full upon a cotton field, making it gleam like a blanket of snow. Jerry thought he had never seen a prettier sight. Blowing out the candle, he was soon asleep. Very shortly something awoke him, he could not tell what. He must have dreamed that he heard a tapping at the window. Half asleep he turned over on the pillow and drowsily he heard the darkies' voices:

"Ole Dan Tucker he got drunk,
"He fell in de fire, an' he kicked up er chunk.
"Clear de way—"

And once more he was fast asleep.

Again he was awakened, and this time he sat up in bed and listened. Once more there came on his window blind a "tap-tap, tap-tap," like the noise of a woodpecker. Jumping out of bed, he went over to the window and asked, "Who's there?"

A soft guttural voice answered, "Chineabee."

"Why, what's the matter, Chineabee?" he asked.

"Somebody diggin' for box in graveyard on hill," was the answer.

"Who? White man or black?" asked Jerry, reaching for his clothes in the dark at the same time.

"Two nigger,—Irvine one," the Indian answered.

"Great guns! I wonder how many more saw me bury that box," exclaimed Jerry. "How did you know it was there, Chineabee?"

Jerry was now quite awake.

"Big Indian 'possum-huntin'. Pass by graveyard. See you plant it. Say nothin'. Indian no tell," he said.

"Well, if I don't scare the daylight out of two sons of Ham, I'll most," said Jerry.

Taking a sheet from the bed, he cut a large rent in the center of it with his knife. Snatching the white case from a pillow, he cut four small holes in one side of it. Then gathering them in a bundle under his arm, he took from his bureau a long pistol and handed another to Chineabee through the window. The Indian shook his head, and, pointing to his belt, showed that he was already armed.

"Good," said Jerry, and slipping out the door he joined the old chief, and the two went trotting along, half-bent, by the fence.

"Somebody diggin' for box in graveyard on hill"

"What were you doing out to-night, Chineabee?" asked Jerry, as they hurried along.

"See Irvine hiden' in woods before sun go down. Indian keep watch Miss Elmore's house. Him sit in dark behind smoke-house under walnut tree."

"You are a good friend, Chineabee," said Jerry.

They were nearing the quarters and a broad light from the cabins gleamed right across their path. There was no time to lose; so, lying flat, they crawled quickly across, through the grass. The negroes were singing loudly; the noise of their dancing feet sounded like a thresher.

"Balmoral, ladies, balmoral! Swing yo' yaller balmoral!"

The moon was getting dangerously high, and Jerry knew that they must hurry. The thieves in the graveyard knew this, too, and were digging fast.

The pines were so thick that the moonlight could hardly filter through, and Jerry and Chineabee glided from tree to tree until they were within ten feet of the negroes. One was a stranger and wore a Yankee uniform. They were digging a short distance from the spot where Jerry had buried the box, but they had tried a number of

places unsuccessfully, as the torn-up ground around showed.

Jerry quickly donned the sheet and pulled the pillow-case over his head. Then, knowing that an Indian can usually imitate the call of any bird, he whispered to Chineabee to give the screech-owl's cry. The quavering call coming suddenly so close at hand, both negroes dropped their spades and glanced about.

As their faces were half turned, listening, Jerry slowly glided from the tree, with hands extended, and moaning low and solemnly. Throwing their arms wildly in the air, the negroes uttered a yell that echoed through the grove. For a moment they struggled, falling, rolling over each other, and fighting each other in their efforts to get away. Another instant and they were running like mad through the woods, with Jerry close behind, the latter every now and then emitting an unearthly groan. They fell into ditches and tumbled over fences, tearing their clothes and bruising their shins. Irvine, in his panic, headed for the quarters, with the strange negro at his heels. The banjos were twanging still, but most of the negroes had gone outside their cabins for a breath of fresh air and a moment's rest.

"They were running like mad through the woods"

Suddenly the quarters were thrown into the wildest confusion. The air was filled with screams and moans and calls for help, mingled with the banging of doors and the slamming down of windows. Chairs were overturned in the fight for right-of-way as Irvine, with his partner of the night, tore through the long lane of the quarters, like a fiery comet, yelling at every breath, and pursued by the white phantom.

Old Jake, sitting in front of his cabin, with his straight chair propped back against the wall, smoking as usual, was knocked sprawling on his stomach, and both fugitives pitched headlong over the chair. Jerry, just behind, was running so fast he could not stop himself, so he too fell over them and mixed up in the general mêlée, adding more to their terror.

They had hardly touched the ground, though, before they were up and away again, with Jerry close behind. As they turned the corner of a cabin like a cyclone they passed old Napoleon. who was coming down to see what the noise was. He so far forgot his dignity as to fall upon his all-fours and go running in this fashion straight into a low chicken-house, plump into the hens, who set up a fearful squawking and cackling and

flew out, scattering in all directions, and pandemonium reigned supreme.

Candles were instantly snuffed out, leaving everything in darkness.

Tired out with the chase, Jerry snatched off his disguise, and, taking a short cut back through the fields, he found the Indian where he had left him, carefully shoveling the dirt back into the holes. The former was panting so for breath and was so convulsed with laughter that he lay flat on the ground to rest and give vent to his mirth, while Chineabee raked the leaves and smoothed the ground, occasionally giving a grunt or a chuckle of appreciation. After a while the two started home in different directions, Jerry having thanked the old chief warmly for his kind service of the night.

As Jerry reached his room he noticed that the quarters were as dark and silent as the grave, but it was past midnight before he could compose himself to sleep.

The next morning the wildest excitement prevailed among the negroes. They, one and all, believed that it was the devil himself who had chased some benighted sinner right through the quarters under their very noses. Some thought

they had recognized Irvine, and believed that just retribution had at last overtaken him.

As each rendered his version of the night's affair it reached alarming proportions. One said the "Hant" was twenty feet tall and had long horns and a fiery tail; others, that it rolled along like a bale of cotton and moaned like the wind.

But Jerry was satisfied that the valuables would be safe in the graveyard after that night.

CHAPTER XII

FOR several days the children had been much elated over the news that the sorghum-makers were on their way to The Meadows, with their presser and boiling-pans, to make up the year's supply of syrup. Their coming was awaited each year by the young people on the plantation with happiest anticipation, for it usually meant a candy-pulling and a night of revelry. All day the negroes would be busy cutting the juicy ribbon-cane and loading the wagons in the fields, and the children would ride on top of the loads as they were being driven down to the spring grove and piled high in stacks, ready to be crushed and made into syrup.

Early one morning a great lumbering and scraping was heard on the main road, and the twins ran in, dancing and clapping their hands, for the big machines of the sorghum-makers were coming. There were busy times then at The Meadows. The mill and the pans were soon placed and the syrup-making began.

The fence around the shady spring grove was

alive with little negroes, watching the proceedings, while Barney and Bessie darted about in high glee, running errands or playing with the dogs.

Round and round in a circle the mules tramped, turning the grinders, which were two shining steel columns that revolved so close together that the long stalks of cane were pressed dry as they passed between them, and the juice poured into vessels beneath. It kept two negroes busy feeding the press with the stalks of cane, while others rode the mules, cracking their whips and calling loudly to one another, or singing as they rode.

In another part of the grove was placed the boiling-pan, which was almost as large as the bed of a wagon, shallow, and with broad grooves running lengthwise, through which the molasses ran and boiled in a seething mass. At the end was an engine, or boiler stove, which furnished the heat. On either side of the pan stood men, with bright long-handled shovels, dipping and pouring the sticky mass, while others fed the fire in the engine. The foam was dipped off into buckets, and this was carried to the house by the children to be made into candy.

Mrs. Elmore had promised them their annual candy-pulling, but warned them not to expect

the heretofore bountiful supper. She suggested that they make a quantity of apple cider, and she would have Aunt Nora bake some of her famous gingerbread and pound cake to serve with it.

They gaily agreed to this, and while Jerry, on horseback, delivered the invitations, which had been written by the cousins, they gathered the fall apples, filling baskets and carrying them to the cider mill, which stood under a shed in the barnyard. There, with the assistance of the little darkies, Flem and Nero, they worked faithfully all the morning until they had several jugs of delicious cider. When Jerry returned he helped them to roll the jugs in wheelbarrows down to the spring-house.

As they went along Bessie kept teasing Jerry for just one more taste. Squeezing Barney's arm, she said: "Oh, Barney, I jes' can't wait till to-night for some of that gingerbread and cider. I feels ticklish all over when I thinks about it."

"Bessie," answered her twin seriously, "if you keep tastin' and er tastin', nuffin'll taste like itself to-night, and you'll jes' have to sit and watch me eat." At this appalling thought Bessie subsided.

When they reached the spring-house they sank the jugs almost to the necks in the brook that ran

through the house. The water was as cold as ice, and here and there, half immersed in the stream, were jars of buttermilk and crocks of cream. The interior of the house was painted white, and a low shelf ran around the sides, with the water lapping the edges. On the shelves were blue covered bowls of sweet yellow butter and baskets of fresh eggs.

By candlelight that evening the children were dressed and fluttering about excitedly. Ben was the proud possessor of a pair of new shoes that creaked as he walked, and that had cost $17.50, for shoes were a luxury now, and Confederate money had begun to decrease alarmingly in value. Barney's suit fitted him, as Jerry expressed it, "rather quick," for it was two seasons old, but, as it had been sponged and pressed, it looked surprisingly new. His shoes had been mended, half-soled, and blacked by Uncle Jake till he could almost see himself in them, so altogether he looked something of a dandy. Bessie fared better than the rest. Her slippers were almost new, her white dress had needed only a ruffle to lengthen it, and she had been presented by Cousin Ala with a new sash and a ribbon for her curls.

Torches and tar kegs were lighted in the grove,

and the guests began to arrive on horseback, in carriages, and even in wagons. Young and old came, and soon little children and grandmothers were pulling candy side by side.

After a while the moon came up over the hills, bathing the grove in mellow light, and the children darted about like fairies among the trees and the flowers. The girls, in their thin muslin dresses, were chatting together in groups, with their arms about one another, for there was a dearth of beaux, as their sweethearts, you remember, were all gone to war. How sweet came the breath of the honeysuckle and the mimosa. A mocking-bird broke into song in the tall magnolia.

Servants moved about, passing trays of cake and glasses of cold cider.

At last, the candy having all been pulled, most of the guests went into the house to have some music. Many of the girls had good voices and a number of old favorites were sung. Then some one proposed a Virginia reel, which met with instant approval.

Three of the best players were brought in from the quarters, with their banjos, and all the young people took their places. Dr. Murray was to "call out." Just as he sang out, "Salute your

partners!" the gallop of horses' feet was heard almost at the very door, and, as the party stood in position all ready for the dance, the parlors were quickly filled with Yankee soldiers.

They were led by a handsome young officer, who bowed very low to the ladies and apologized for their intrusion, saying, "We saw the lights and heard the music, and we could not resist the impulse to come in."

At once he was recognized as the captain who had figured in Bessie's martin-box affair and who, with his comrades, had guarded the premises the same afternoon. He gave his name and those of his men present, saying that they were a small detachment going across country to join their company. At first Mrs. Elmore was indignant, but as she looked at the young fellow in command her heart smote her, for she thought of her own dear grandson far away and perhaps lonely that night. Although they were enemies they were some mother's boys and were, perhaps, homesick too. Not one of them seemed over twenty-one, and they were very courteous.

Turning swiftly, the guests were surprised to hear her order the servants to bring more cider and cake, which she offered to the soldiers. They

thanked her warmly and declared they had tasted nothing so excellent since they had come into Dixie.

Then the young soldiers begged the girls to continue the dance and let them act as partners. Many of the girls, however, feeling that they would be disloyal to the South, indignantly refused and very haughtily left the room at the "very presumption of a Yankee!" But several, in a spirit of mischief, agreed, and Fannie, having now, it seemed, overcome her timidity at the sight of blue coats, walked to the end of the room with the young commanding officer and, bowing low to each other, they proceeded to lead off the dance.

"And so you never expected to see me again?" he asked. But Fannie only tossed her head and made no reply.

"I know very little of this Southern dance," he whispered to her.

"I will teach you," she answered. "Watch me."

"I could wish for no fairer teacher," he said, as, with hands held high, they turned in the dance.

"We may teach you something besides dancing, Sir Knight, before this war is over," she answered saucily.

"And so you never expected to see me again?"

"And that is?" he questioned, smiling.

"We may teach you to run," she said, with flushed cheeks and eyes shining. He laughed out loud as he swung his vis-à-vis, but before he could answer there was a shout outside and a soldier burst into the room, crying: "The rebels! The rebels!"

It was a novel cry at The Meadows. Heretofore it had always been: "The Yankees! The Yankees!"

Every man left his partner and made for the door.

The officer with Fannie lingered long enough to say to her, "You spoke truer than you thought."

Then he hurried away, and she called mockingly to him, "Run, run!"

"Oh, I'm doing that fast enough," he called back from the door, "but I'll get even yet."

They had scarcely gotten out of the grove and down the road before a squad of grey coats came galloping past the gate in hot pursuit. The cry of "Halt!" rang out down the road again and again, and then a fusillade of shots, but the fugitives did not heed. Away around the bend they went, pursued and pursuers, flying like the wind,

and the watchers at The Meadows could hear the beat of hoofs growing fainter and fainter, then die away altogether.

The guests on the piazza and in the grove stood talking excitedly, or conversing in awestruck voices. After a while some one at the gate called, "Listen, they are coming back!" and soon the whole party of Confederates came riding up. As they turned into the big gate Ben, sitting on the gate post, gave a war-whoop, tumbling off in his excitement.

"It's brother George! It's brother George! Hurrah! Whoopee!"

The next instant Mrs. Elmore was clasped close in the arms of her grandson.

"Grandmother," he laughed breathlessly, "we didn't wish to give you a scare and break up the party. We were passing from an excursion some miles distant, and, being that near home, the desire to see you and the children was more than I could stand. And when we learned from a scout of the party of the arrival of the Yankees, why, we *had* to come."

He introduced his friends, though some were well known to everybody present, and the servants hastened out for another supply of refreshments.

Fannie's nervousness could not be longer con-

trolled, and, getting George aside, she asked if any of the Yankees had been killed or wounded.

"No," he answered, "they were just out of range of our fire, and ride as hard as we might, we saw that further pursuit would be useless."

He wondered at the look of relief that crossed her face, but the twang of banjos sounded just then in a rollicking tune. They all took their places again and the dance which had been so rudely interrupted progressed with much merriment, although the partners of the girls had changed, and where an hour before they were gaily swung by boys in blue they now bowed gracefully to their own bonnie lads in grey.

'Twas after midnight when the guests departed. George had found a quiet moment to slip away and talk with his grandmother and to answer dozens of questions from the children.

Reluctantly the cavalrymen said good-bye to the girls, and, swinging into their saddles, they rode away into the night, singing an old Southern song, their voices blending well in the chorus:

"Darling Chloe, darling Chloe,
"Your sweet face I soon shall see, I know;
"When the Southern sunny breeze
"Fans the old palmetto trees
"I am going home to see my darling Chloe."

CHAPTER XIII

ALL day long the rain had swept down in gusts and beat a tattoo on the window-panes. Barney, with his nose pressed flat against the glass, was watching the little rivulets running from the gutters, and Bessie was lying on the big rug before the blazing fire, with her elbows propping her chin on her hands, reading Robinson Crusoe.

Flinging away the book, she joined Barney at the window, where for a time they blew their hot breath upon the glass and with their fingers drew fantastic pictures for amusement; but 'twas plainly seen that the twins were getting restless, and must shortly have an outlet for their overflowing spirits. Suddenly Barney suggested, "Let's go to the weaving rooms and get Mammy Hannah to tell us a story." Bessie agreed promptly. She always agreed to Barney's schemes, though usually it was Bessie who was the quicker to propose. They were generally of one mind and seldom quarreled. The weaving house was a double log house, each room twenty

feet square, with a great stone chimney in the center. Very soon two little figures went tripping along the flat foot-log that ran from the house out to the weaving rooms, with their arms about each other, and holding over their heads a very dilapidated umbrella.

Opening the door quickly, they bounced in without ceremony, making the half dozen colored girls at the looms jump at their sudden entrance. The girls were weaving a counterpane and the noise of the looms filled the room, so the twins did not tarry there, but hurried into the next room where, before a glowing fire of logs, sat Mammy Hannah, carding vigorously. Dilcie stood near at the spinning-wheel, which sang a cozy accompaniment to the rain outside. Uncle Jake reclined in a split-bottomed chair on the other side of the hearth, his feet stretched out to the blaze, doing absolutely nothing but smoking his cob pipe. As the children entered, Dilcie exclaimed, "Whut devilment is you two twinses up to now?"

"Nothing," answered Bessie. "We're awful good, really."

"Dar now," grunted old Jake, knocking his pipe on the andirons. "Den look out fer sumpen ter happen."

But Bessie was busy making herself comfortable in a broken chair, while Barney dragged up a three-legged stool and seated himself close to his old Mammy. Laying his head on her knee, he said: "Mammy, we want you to tell us a tale. We're lonesome."

"Tell us about Waucomaco," quickly interposed Bessie.

"Honey, I'se done telled dat tale ter so many chillun tell my tongue nearly draps off er tellin'," objected Mammy, "and youenses knows hit by heart."

"We don't care, it's the best one of all," they insisted.

Mammy Hannah laid both her cards filled with wool on a near-by bench, adjusted the blue bandanna tighter about her head, and began:

"Onct, er long time ergo—"

"Wait, Mammy, wait," cried Bessie. Barney had already climbed on one knee, and Bessie scrambled to the other, while Mammy gathered them both in her strong arms and pillowed their heads on her ample bosom.

"Lawdy mussy," she grumbled, "dese chillun gwine ter set in dey ole Mammy's lap tell dey feets drag on de flo'." But she seemed very

pleased to have them there, and hugged them to her as she spoke.

It was growing dark outside, and as the hickory logs fell apart a shower of sparks flew up the chimney, lighting up the big room with a warm bright glow. Just then the quavering, piteous cry of a screech-owl sounded in the branches of the walnut tree outside. Mammy Hannah spilled the twins out of her lap and reached down for her shoe. Snatching it off, she laid it upside down on the hearth. Simultaneously old Jake turned both trouser pockets wrong side out, scattering bits of tobacco, nails, and horn buttons over the floor, while Dilcie thrust the shovel into the fire. The three then resumed their interrupted occupations as if this was all a natural and ordinary proceeding.

Having gathered the children once more on her lap, Mammy began: "Onct, a long time ergo, dere wuz er little blue-eyed gal jes' lak Bessie, 'cept she had yaller hair, an' er little blue-eyed boy lak Barney; an' dey wuz lef' all by deyse'ves in er great big house. Dey ma an' dey pa had done died an' lef' 'um. Well, one night when dey wuz setten' all by demse'ves, an' de fire wuz purty nigh out, er monstrous big rat run right

'cross de flo, in front uv 'um. Hit were powerful big, but dey didn't pay no 'tention ter hit dat time; but purty soon hit run ergin.

"'Did you see dat, sister?' de little boy sez, sezze. An' his sister said she did. 'If hit runs ergin, I'm gwine ter burn dis here house up!'

"Atter while, sho' 'nough hit run ergin, an' de little boy up an' tuck er match, he did, an' sez as how he wuz gwine ter burn de house down. De little gal axed him not ter do dat, an' den she 'gin ter cry, too, but, bless yer, he jes' done hit anyhow. Den dar dey wuz, out in de cold an' no house over dey heads. Course hit were de Bad Man whut put hit inter de little boy's head ter do dat, de very Ole Boy hisse'f.

"Den de little boy saw whut he'd done, an' he felt sorry, so he brace hisse'f up, he did, an' he say, 'I ain't gwine ter be wicked no more, little sister, I'm gwine ter take kere uv you!' Wid dat he tuck his sister's han', an' dey marched right along out uv de town. Dey went, an' went, an' went, an' atter a while dey come ter some big dark woods; an' when dey got in dar' hit wuz so dark dat dey could sca'cely see dey han's befo' 'um. Dey met a boy an' axed him whut wuz de matter; but he jes' said 'Sh,' an' went on. Den dey axed

another little boy, an' den another; but dey all said, 'Sh! sh!'

"But purty soon dey met a lady an' axed her. De lady whispered to 'um ter come wid her, an' she tuck 'um ter her house, an' way back in er closet she set 'um down, an' shet de do'. Den she whispered easy lak an' sez, sez she: 'A big ole black bird rules here. Dis is his lan', an' he won't let hit git light, 'caze he say folks would all be too happy an' wouldn't work an' serve him.'

" 'But how does yer know when ter git up an' go ter bed?' axed de little gal.

" 'Well,' sez de lady, sez she, 'whenever hit's time ter git up er go ter bed, he sets up on de high tower an' sings:

"'"Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'"Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'"Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'"Cum diddleum atdedo!'"

" 'But,' sez she, 'if he wuz ter hear anybody mockin' him, he'd kill 'um dat minute. He done giv dat out.'

"De little boy axed de lady ter let 'em stay dere an' sleep over whut dey called de night, an' she said dey could. She giv 'um er room wid er

great big bed in hit, wid four tall postes an' er yaller teester. Hit had a high foot-board whut had wooden lions on each side. Dey lay down, dey did, an' de little boy git out his pocket-knife an' 'gin sharpenin' hit on his shoe.

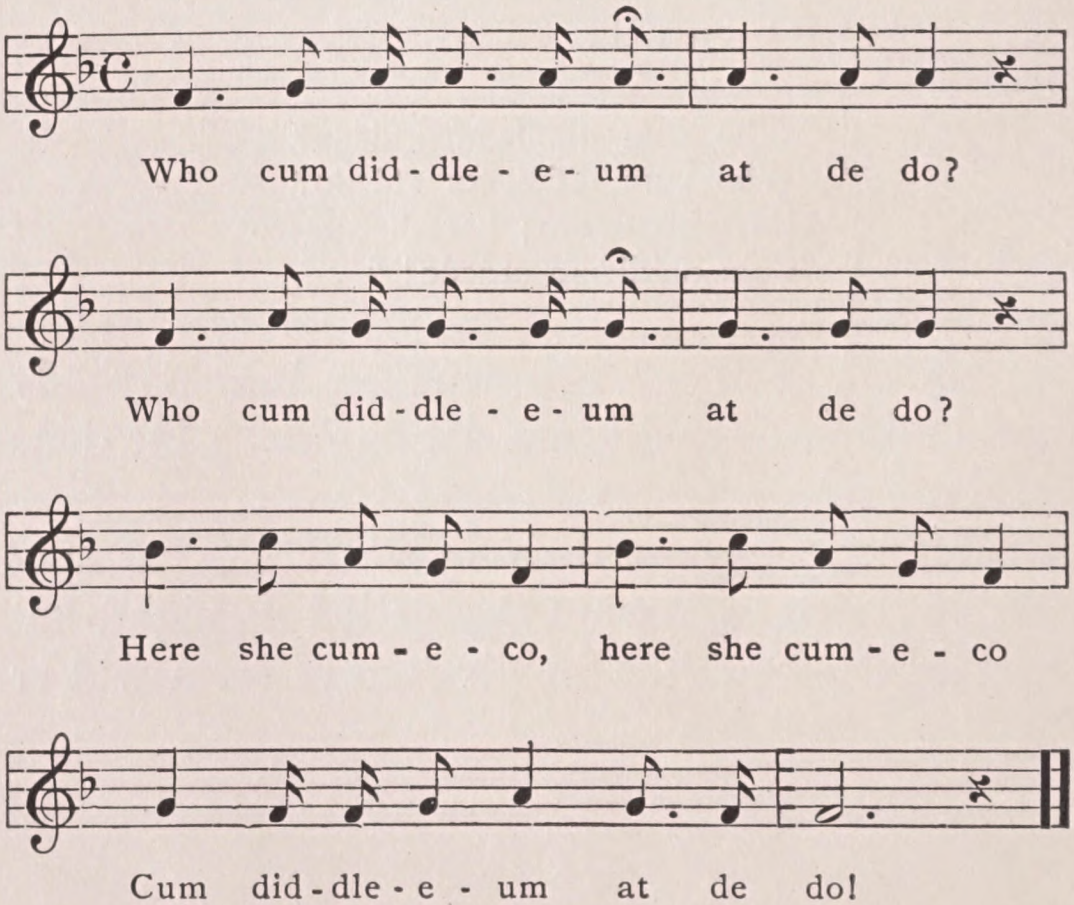
"'Whut you doin', brother?' axed de little gal.

"'Jes' sharpenin' my knife, sister, jes' sharpenin' my knife.'

"Purty soon dey heerd de ole bird in de tower singin':

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo?'

LITTLE BOY—*Bird an octave lower.*



"De little boy sot up in de bed, he did, an' listen, an' den he 'gun ter mock him an' sing:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"De ole bird picked up his years an' listen. 'Who dat dar mockin' me?' he sez. He wuz mad ez Tucker, an' he flewed on de chimley of de house next to de one whar de chillun wuz in, an' he sez, sezze:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"An' de little boy he up an' sings sassylike:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"Jehoshaphat! De ole bird wuz mad. He flewed right down in er tree by de house an' sung:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"Den de little boy sung back at him right big-gitty:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

" 'Oh, brother!' de little gal said, 'please don't mock de bird. *Please*, *please* don't.'

"But de little boy sez, 'Don't you be afeared, little sister!'

"Den de bird ruffle up his feathers an' flewed down on de winder-sill an' sing:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"An' de little boy look right at him an' sing back:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"De big bird wuz mad as pizen, he wuz, an'

he flewed in de berry room an' lit right on de foot uv de bed on one uv de lions, an' he lif his long neck up an' sing:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"An' de little boy look him in de eye an' sing right back:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"De little gal hollered, she did, an' kivered up her head, she wuz so skeered. Now, all de time de bird wuz a-cummin' de little boy had been er-sharpenin' his knife, tell it wuz jes' lak er razor.

"De ole bird wuz so outdone an' mad, he flap his wings togedder an' jes' *roar*:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"Den de little boy shuck his fis' at him, he did, an' sing out loud:

"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Who cum diddleum atdedo?
"'Hereshecumeco; hereshecumeco
"'Cum diddleum atdedo!'

"Dis time de ole bird had enough, an' he come closer and closer; an' he flapped right down an' *grabbed* de little boy! But de little boy wuz ready fer him, an' he wuzn't skeered. Dey fit an' dey fit, an' dey clawed an' bite an' dey scratched; an' all at onct de little boy tuck his knife an' chop de ole bird's head off, an' kilt 'im *dead*.

"Den, lo an' behole, hit 'gun to git light. De chickens 'gun ter crow an' de birds sung. All de waggins an' buggies rolled out uv de sheds an' rattled erlong. All de people commenced ter laugh an' sing an' dance.

"'Who kilt de king-bird? Who kilt de big bird?' dey all axed.

"Atter a while dey come ter de house whar de little boy an' his sister wuz; an' de little boy tole 'um he kilt de big bird, an' he showed 'um his big ole black body layin' dar. Den dey all re-

joiced an' shouted, an' dey said de little boy could have anything he wanted. He tole 'um he wanted jes' three things,—er whip, an' er ball uv cord, an' two slices uv bread an' butter.

"Dey gin 'um ter him, dey did, an' he tuck 'um, an' den he led his little sister by de han' an' dey went out uv de city. When dey got out in de country, de little boy tuck de cord an' helt on ter one en' while he throwed de ball way up in de sky, an' hit cotch on de clouds.

"Den he tole his little sister ter foller him, an' he 'gun climein' de string. Dey climed an' dey climed, an' de little boy would pop his whip an' hit would make de lightenin' shoot about an' de thunder rattle; an' dat parted de clouds an' lighted de way fer 'um. At last dey clum clean up ter Heaben, an' de big gole doors opened, dey did, an' dey went in, an' dere wuz dey ma an' pa."

Here Mammy's voice crooned sleepily to a whisper. The sound of the looms had ceased, and the wind outside had calmed. The drip, drip, from the eaves was the only sound. Dilcie's spinning-wheel sat back in the corner, and Uncle Jake nodded by the smouldering fire. His pipe had gone out and lay on his lap, with the ashes spilled on the hearth. The children were both

in a reverie, their eyes on the dying coals, and Mammy's brown cheek rested gently on the little girl's curly head.

CHAPTER XIV

HARVEST time had come. The winds blew cool and sweet with the odor of the pines; the sumach bushes were all aflame, and the purple grapes hung ripe and tempting, while all day long the cheery call of "B-o-b W-h-i-t-e,"—"B-o-b W-h-i-t-e,"—was heard near the woodlands and about the fields.

Many of the negroes had run away from the plantation,—only the reliable, faithful ones stayed, and a number of mules and horses had been sold to obtain money and save expense; so only a part of the plantation was now in cultivation.

The children rode home on loads of yellow corn, which was stored in the big barns. The threshers were busy threshing the wheat, and on the morrow Jerry was to carry a wagon-load to Montevallo to be ground into flour. This would mean a three or four days' trip, and the boys, Barney and Ben, pleaded with their grandmother to let them go with him, which she finally con-

sented to do. Nero, too, was allowed to go, to help Jerry with the mules.

The boys could hardly wait for morning to break, and were up when the first light of dawn appeared, while Aunt Nora bustled about in the kitchen, preparing their breakfast by candlelight. Mrs. Elmore and Bessie were down too, arranging a basket of eatables for them to take, for they were to camp out at night.

Fresh eggs, a bowl of butter, a jar of meal, salt and sugar, and ham and bacon were being carefully packed.

The boys scarcely tasted breakfast, so elated were they over the coming trip and the prospect of camping out. They were to go in a covered spring-wagon, drawn by four strong mules. The wagon was loaded with the sacks of wheat, and underneath was tied securely bundles of fodder for the mules, buckets for water, a coffee-pot, and a frying-pan for cooking their meals.

No wonder the boys were in high glee.

Inside the wagon was water-proof and dry, for the cover was of double thickness, and a sheet of oilcloth was carried as an additional protection in case of a heavy thunder-storm. Jerry had been working for a week, fashioning a tent out of

two old wagon sheets, and this was folded and laid over the sacks of wheat.

Dr. Murray came riding up just as the wagon was being loaded, and, calling to Jerry, handed him some money, with the request that he buy as much good whiskey with it as it would pay for. He needed the whiskey for medicinal use among his patients.

At last all was in readiness. The boys kissed their grandmother good-bye and climbed into the wagon. Jerry gathered up the reins, and at the crack of the whip the four mules started off briskly, with Jerry's spotted bulldog trotting along under the wagon.

Bessie ran to an up-stairs window and waved to them as long as she could see them.

The boys were joyously happy, and they talked and laughed excitedly. Pretending that they were pioneers traveling westward, they named themselves the "Sons of Daniel Boone."

The morning was fine. The birds caroled in the lanes, or flew, chattering in groups, to the rail fence corners. A light breeze had sprung up, tossing the elderbushes and goldenrod along the way. Soon they left the familiar landmarks of their own plantation, then those of their neigh-

bors, and after a while they were traveling over roads unknown to them. At noon they halted at a spring by the roadside, ate their lunch, and rested under the shade of the trees.

After watering the mules they started again on their journey. When it began to grow dark Jerry looked for the first brook that ran across the road and followed its course into the woods until he found a little spring, running from under the rocks. Here they decided to spend the night. Nero and Ben unhitched and fed the mules, while Jerry cut poles and put up the tent. Barney raked the ground clean inside and covered the dirt floor with pine needles and balsam. Over this he spread a big red coverlet; then he helped Jerry build the camp-fire.

They were so well provided with good things by their grandmother that they had to make only a pot of coffee for their supper. They were very tired from the long ride of the day, and the minute supper was over each wrapped himself in his blanket,—for the nights were cool,—then crept into the tent and fell asleep. The spotted bulldog stretched himself near the fire, between the tent and the wagon, to keep watch.

The next morning when the boys opened their

eyes the sun was streaming into the tent and Jerry was bending over the fire, cooking breakfast. The savory smell of broiling ham and boiling coffee was too much for sleepy heads, and, kicking out of their blankets, they raced each other down to the brook to wash their faces in the cool running water. When they returned they were ready to do justice to Jerry's excellent cooking.

Thus they traveled for four days and nights, sometimes walking by the wagon or running foot-races, and now and then halting for Jerry or Dave to take a shot at a saucy squirrel or a covey of partridges, to help out the next meal. Occasionally the stop was made to gather nuts, wild grapes, or muscadines. To change their menu, they would sometimes fish for a while at their noon hour at a particularly fine stream, often catching enough fresh silver trout for their dinner. When fried brown and eaten with one of Jerry's famous corn "Johnny cakes" they couldn't be excelled,—in the boy's minds, at least.

The sun was sinking in a bank of golden clouds when they came in sight of the famous walnut grove on the edge of Montevallo; and in a little while they reached the beautiful shoal creek, its waters rippling over the stones and sparkling in

the western sunlight. Crossing the bridge leading into the town, they drove to the Wells Hotel, where they were to stay. This was commonly called "The Hotel," as it was the only one in town.

After they had brushed up their travel-stained clothes a bit, Jerry took them out to see the sights. The wheat was not to be ground until morning, so they wandered about leisurely the rest of the afternoon. The long main street of the town was lined with country wagons, some filled with wheat, others with cotton or late watermelons.

Seeing a crowd at a corner of the street, Jerry cautiously approached, the boys keeping close to him. All at once the spotted bulldog began to growl and the hair along his back-bone to stand erect. Then they caught a glimpse of the object of attraction. It was a big black bear, with a chain about its neck, the end of which was held by the queerest-looking man that the boys had ever seen.

His hair hung low on his shoulders and he wore a little peaked hat, adorned with a red feather. His coat was of brown velvet and his breeches were green. His shoes turned up in a point at the toes and a little bell that jingled as he walked

"The object of attraction"

was sewed on the tip of each, and from his ears dangled large gold ear-rings.

Nero had to hold the spotted bulldog's collar tight to prevent his going after that bear, then and there. Going closer, they saw a little placard on the bear's neck, on which was printed, "Punch and Judy Show To-night," and also the time and the place and the amount of admittance.

The bear clog-danced, marched up and down, then bowed and sat down; and the boys were immensely entertained. They teased Jerry all the way back to the hotel to take them to the show that night; and he, nearly as anxious to see the fun as they, promised that after supper he would count his cash and see if he could spare the amount necessary for admittance; for money was very scarce then, and even a few pennies could not be wasted with impunity.

After elaborately figuring and counting the cost in the room after supper Jerry decided, much to their joy, that they would go. Nero, who was to sleep on a pallet in their room, rolled over and kicked up his heels in delight, for of course he was to be taken along. Jerry ripped open the band inside his hat and having taken out the necessary amount, drew from his pocket a needle

and thread and carefully sewed the band back, right in the same stitches.

Soon the quartet started down the dimly lighted street and entered the grove of walnuts, where gleamed the white tent, lighted with torches fastened to posts among the trees. When they reached the show tent a new obstacle confronted them. The gate-keeper, a sour-faced individual, refused to let Nero enter, saying, "The nigger can't come in."

"Well," said Ben, "if he doesn't go in, your audience will be four less, for we will not go in without him."

Seeing that he was about to lose money, and having a small audience anyway, the man sullenly consented and allowed Nero to enter and sit on a box down in front, in a corner near the stage. Nero was so pleased that he showed his white teeth in a broad grin as he followed the boys and Jerry down to a seat near the right of the stage, and no one laughed or applauded louder than he did as the performance progressed. They each received full value for their money that night, and they laughed and shouted until their sides fairly ached at the antics of old Punch and his wife, Judy. The bear showed some clever tricks,

and a funny clown performed wonderful acrobatic feats.

On the way to the hotel Barney sleepily said that he was going to write down everything that he had seen since leaving home, for fear he might forget to tell it all to Bessie on his return.

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning, the wheat having been ground into flour and sacked, the travelers turned their faces homeward. They had driven but a few miles out from the town and were traveling on the old stage road, which was crossed and re-crossed by many rivulets, when they saw, farther on, a singular-looking caravan. As they drew nearer it proved to be two square-topped wagons, very fantastic in appearance. One was red, the other green, and in the sides of each were set oblong mirrors, about which were painted grotesque figures, monkeys, birds, and queer-looking little men and women.

The rear wagon was fitted up for a kitchen and, suspended from the top, hung all kinds of tinware, which jingled merrily with every movement. It was drawn by two spotted, or calico, horses. The front wagon was filled with bedding and boxes, and before it pranced two black Mexican ponies.

As the driver leaned out at their approach they recognized the doorkeeper of the Punch and Judy show, and both the boys exclaimed, "It's the show-

men!" At the same time the leaders of their mule team made the same discovery, for they began to plunge, snort, and prick up their ears; and again the spotted bulldog began to vent his indignation, for there, stalking along in front, was the big black bear, led by his queer-looking master.

Nero caught the bulldog and put him in the wagon. The clown, who was driving the rear show wagon, halted and, jumping to the ground, called to the man in front. Seeing the frightened mules, they drove their wagons to one side of the road, making the bear sit down behind the wagons, and then the mules allowed Jerry to drive them by. When they had passed, the boys asked Jerry to drive slowly, while they sat, with feet hanging out the back of the wagon, and entered into animated conversation with the men of the show.

When they reached a spring and stopped for their noon meal they invited the showmen to share their dinner. The bear was tied to a tree, some distance from the wagons, and all set to work to build a fire and prepare dinner. The showmen proved to be Mexicans who had come up from Mobile and were making their way back

through Mississippi, thence to New Orleans. For an hour after dinner they all talked while the men smoked. The Mexicans related many strange stories of their travels and finally took the boys over to their wagons, showing them all their show trappings, and even taking Punch and Judy and the Policeman out of their boxes, allowed the boys to hold them in their hands.

At length Jerry called, "Come on, boys; we must be going." Very reluctantly they shook hands with their new acquaintances and bade them good-bye. As they climbed into their wagon the man with the sour face, who really proved to be not nearly so sour as his face indicated, walked over and presented Jerry, Ben, and Barney, each, with a piece of Mexican money as a keepsake. They were nice souvenirs and a curiosity to the boys. To Nero he gave a red skullcap on which was sewn many copper bangles. It had once been worn by the bear, but Nero didn't mind. He was immensely pleased, and pulled it down tight over his kinky head as Ben drove off, for Jerry was busy sewing the Mexican money into his hatband.

At the first forks of the road the showmen left them, while our travelers kept the main road. After this incident the first three days and nights

passed uneventfully. The weather was fine, and the mules traveled without urging, on the homeward way.

The third day, however, on account of several stops, they were much later in arriving at the camping place they wished to reach than they had anticipated. It was already dark when Jerry said, "Here we are, boys, at last." Crossing a stream, he was just turning into an abandoned road, leading into the woods, when a gruff voice called, "Halt there!" At the same time eight men stepped into the road from behind the bushes on either side. Jerry recognized them at once as "blue coats," and his mind began to work quickly.

"What do you want?" he called to them.

"You are prisoners," answered one, stepping up to the wagon, while two or three others held the mules by the bits.

"How many are you?" asked another.

As Jerry did not speak, Ben answered for him, "One man and three boys."

"Drive into the forest," was the command.

Jerry sat silent, and the man called out: "Look sharp there! Can't you hear?"

Getting no response, the soldier climbed over the wheel to the driver's seat and, snatching the

reins from Jerry, cracked the whip so loudly that the mules plunged forward in a gallop and the wagon lurched heavily from side to side. Then they went more slowly, and two soldiers climbed into the back of the wagon, while the others walked by the sides.

Jerry leaned over close to Ben and whispered, "Pretend that I am deaf,—and a fool, too."

Soon they reached the very spot on which the boys had expected to camp, and it was seen that the Yankees had chosen this place also, for they had already built a roaring camp-fire. When they halted, the prisoners were ordered to dismount. The soldiers began to question Jerry, but he would put one hand behind his ear and ask in an idiotic way, "Hey?" to each question. Seeing that they were only wasting breath, they desisted and addressed all remarks to Ben, who talked just as little as possible, and who had cautioned Barney and Nero, before leaving the wagon, to do likewise.

Finding that they had been to Montevallo, the Yankees began to search them for money, making them strip while they carefully examined each article of clothes. Jerry winked at Ben as they felt all over his hat and handed it back to him,

without discovering the money. They then examined the wagon, but not very carefully, believing that it contained nothing except the many sacks of flour.

They made Jerry cook supper for them while the boys unhitched and brought water from the spring. The prisoners were allowed to eat with the soldiers, and in the course of the conversation it was learned that they were a foraging party sent out by a Yankee troop who were encamped many miles over on another road.

As they had been instructed to secure provisions of any kind, we may be sure that they were glad to find this wagon-load of flour, which, one man said, they would carry over to their camp the next morning. The boys heard this with sinking hearts, but Ben saw Jerry looking at him with a twinkle in his eye, and he braced up considerably.

After supper the boys were made to gather wood for the camp-fire, while Jerry cleared up the cooking vessels. While he was at this task he began to sing in a loud voice:

"Oh, Susanna, and don't you cry fer me,
"I'se just from Alabama, wid de banjo on my knee,
"An' I'se gwine ter Louisiana, my true love fer to see!"

One of the men had just thrown himself down on the ground by the fire, remarking that he had a headache, and he called to Jerry: "Here, you chuckle-headed Johnny! You can stay here, but that fuss can't."

The talk among the Yankees went on.

Jerry's voice rose a little louder:

"De buljin bust, de horse run off,
"I raelly thought I'd die.
"I shet my eyes ter hole my bref,
"Susanna, don't yer cry."

The man on the ground moved one arm from across his face sleepily and called angrily: "I told you to hush! Can't you hear?"

But Jerry seemed very intent on his work and did not heed.

A man laughingly called to the one on the ground: "You'll have to whisper a little louder, Bill. He's stone deaf."

The sleepy man turned over and was soon snoring.

Ben kept his eyes wide open.

Jerry hung up the frying-pan and began to rinse the coffee-pot. As he did so his voice rose high and full:

"I jumped aboard de telegraph,
"I trabbled down de river,
"De 'lectric fluid magnified,
"And kilt five hundred nigger!
"Oh, Susanna, and don't . . ."

"Stop that noise!" and Jerry dexterously dodged a handful of stones, thrown by the now thoroughly awakened soldier.

Standing, with open mouth, looking at the irate soldier, the offender affected great surprise. Another soldier stepped close to Jerry, and, laughing, explained in a low voice that the angry soldier had a headache.

"Ache?—Stomach-ache?" said Jerry, nodding his head in a silly fashion.

"No! *Headache!*" shouted the soldier.

"Yes, stomach-ache," agreed Jerry. "Wait, I'll bring some medicine to cure it," and going quickly over to the wagon, he slipped out the smaller of the two jugs of whiskey from under the sacks and brought it to the man on the ground.

Instantly a cheer went up from the men about the fire. The dipper that was hanging on the wagon was filled again and again and passed around. It was good whiskey, no use denying that. Jerry had bought the best. They offered

him a dipperful, which he pretended to drink, but which in reality he threw over his shoulder.

Soon there was a jovial crowd around that camp-fire, drinking and singing. Jerry noticed that one man drank very little and kept watching him with furtive glances, but he pretended to be as drunk as any one else and soon began to nod. But Jerry's mind was working rapidly.

All the soldiers but the one mentioned were soon thoroughly intoxicated, and in a short while they were lying around the camp-fire dead asleep. Ben, Barney, and Nero had rolled themselves in their blankets near the fire, and the two latter had been asleep for some time; but Ben only feigned sleep, and kept his eye on Jerry to see what next move he would make.

Jerry snored loudly, but Ben knew that he was not asleep. Suddenly, with a bound like a cat, he pounced upon the soldier who had been watching him, and, with one knee on his chest, he held one of the soldier's own pistols to his head and said: "Don't speak a word, but do as I tell you. If you don't I'll shoot you plumb full of holes!"

The soldier was so paralyzed with astonishment that he did not murmur, and Ben ran quickly to Jerry's side to help, if he could.

"Ben sat, with both pistols, guarding him"

"Here, Ben," said the latter, "reach in my pocket and get that piece of rope."

Ben did as he was told.

"Now," said Jerry, "search the prisoner for more weapons."

Ben was frightened and his hands trembled, for the man was cursing dreadfully, but he did as Jerry directed, then held both pistols firmly pointing at the soldier, while Jerry tied his prisoner's hands and feet. This accomplished, he put a finishing touch to his work by ramming a bandanna handkerchief into the soldier's mouth for a gag; then he and Ben dragged the man over to the wagon. After many unsuccessful attempts they succeeded in shoving him up among the flour sacks where Ben sat, with both pistols, guarding him, while Jerry went to awaken the two boys.

They came dragging their blankets and looking very sleepy; but their eyes opened wide enough when they saw that they were about to escape. Jerry hurriedly hitched the mules and began slowly to creep out of the forest.

When they reached the road, out of calling distance of the seven sleeping soldiers, he stopped, and, with Ben's help, lifted the prisoner from the wagon and placed him by the side of the road.

Cutting the cords that bound the man's hands and removing the gag, he said: "Now, old friend, if you keep at it, with plenty of patience, you may succeed in untying your feet by to-morrow noon. That is a knot an Indian chief taught me to make, and you will find it the hardest day's work of your life untying it." Climbing into the wagon, he called, "Good-bye, Yankee Doodle, I hate to do it, but all's fair in love and war, and, by the way, I'll just take these pistols to a gentleman I know, in exchange for his whiskey your friends drank to-night."

With that he laid whip and the four mules bounded for home. All night they rode as fast as they could travel, stopping only once to rest the mules. They went without breakfast that morning, so eager were they to reach The Meadows. About ten o'clock they came in sight of a neighbor's plantation and soon the broad fields of The Meadows spread out before them.

The family were just sitting down to dinner when the travelers came driving up. They all came out to welcome them, and the boys ran to their grandmother, glad to get back to her arms once more. She held them so close that it seemed she never wanted to let them go.

Soon Jerry came up and he and the boys began talking at once, telling of their wonderfully exciting trip, while Nero took to his heels around the house and down to the quarters to tell his experiences to his own black mammy.

CHAPTER XVI

'TWAS Christmas Eve. The day was clear, but the wintry wind came down in gusts, scattering the dry leaves and creaking the branches of the big trees.

Every one entered into the Christmas spirit at The Meadows, and great preparations were always made. This year more had been made than at any time, for the financial depression, caused by the war, was depriving the southern people of many of the luxuries to which they had hitherto been accustomed. The Christmas dinner at The Meadows would not be much lessened, however, as it was furnished almost entirely from the plantation. The mammoth turkey was all ready for the roasting, and so were the chestnuts for the dressing, and the pig that was to be baked whole, and served on a platter, surrounded by yam potatoes, with a red apple in its mouth. The boiled custard had been made and put in the spring-house to cool, or probably freeze.

Early Jerry and the boys went to the woods to bring in the Yule log, which the negroes had cut

the day before. This had always burned in the big fireplace in the front parlor of The Meadows at Christmas time. Jerry rode one horse, and Ben and Barney another. These were hitched to the log by chains and it was dragged in this manner home.

Jake and the little negro boys took a wagon to the woods for Christmas greens. They gathered quantities of southern smilax; long vines, with shiny green leaves and bright red berries, and branches of evergreen, pine, and holly. On top of the load they put the big holly Christmas tree.

When they returned to the house the cousins set to work, making wreaths and long garlands, and many of the negro girls were called in to help. They were in the midst of this when a messenger rode up to the gate. He handed a box to Ben, who had run down to meet him, saying that it had come, through many hands, from Tennessee. Ben thanked the man, and he rode on. Looking at the cover, Ben saw that it was addressed to his cousin Fannie.

The girls met him at the door, curious to know who the messenger was, and of course they were filled with happy excitement when they learned that the box was for Fannie. Hastily breaking

the wrappings and cover, they drew forth a lovely white silk shawl. As they did so a card fell from its folds and before Fannie could recover it they had all read the name upon it.

Instantly there was a scream of laughter and Fannie's face flamed red as fire. The card bore the name of the young Yankee officer who had led the Virginia reel with her on the night when the Yankees were surprised by George and his comrades. In the bottom of the box was a package of fine candies and nuts, and she at once gave the children each a handful sample of Christmas goodies.

How the other two cousins and Ben teased her about her Yankee beau! And when she went to the piano and began to sing "Ever of Thee," they all greeted her with peals of merry laughter. She quickly changed to "Ashes of Roses" and began to sing, "I've buried the past down deep in my heart."

"Why don't you sing, 'I've buried the hatchet'?" shouted Ben.

With that she ran up-stairs to her room and locked the door. Nor would she come down till everybody had promised to be good, when they all set to work again, draping festoons of green

over the windows, the mantels, the pictures; and under each chandelier hung a cluster of mistletoe, with its pearly berries. Each window flaunted a wreath, tied with scarlet. The brasses were polished till they shone like new. The tree stood in the big front parlor, ready for its trimmings.

When Jerry and old Jake had placed the heavy Yule log the former was sent to the dining-room with the boys, to pop corn and string long ropes of it, which were to be used in decorating the tree. For some time before Christmas Aunt Nora had been careful to save the egg-shells, as nearly whole as possible. These were dried, and Mrs. Elmore now cut strips of colored tissue paper, which she pasted around the tops of them; then they were ready to be filled with nuts and candy. All the tinsel and bright-colored paper had been carefully saved throughout the year, and these were made into chains by Bessie, while Barney strung the bright red fruit from the haw tree.

Jerry climbed on a high stool and the cousins and Mrs. Elmore handed him the decorations, while he hung and draped them on. When he had finished, the effect was beautiful.

"Now," said Mrs. Elmore, "we will close the

parlor doors, and when we next see the tree the gifts will all be in place." As they came into the hall she sat down quickly and exclaimed: "Dear, dear me! I have forgotten poor little Janet Jones's doll. How could I be so thoughtless?"

Every servant on the place was busy with the evening chores, or had gone on errands. Jerry was milking. Ben had gone earlier in the afternoon to Dr. Murray's, with gifts.

"That poor child will be so disappointed. She will have no Christmas," sighed Mrs. Elmore, and she looked very tired.

"Don't worry, Grandmother," said Barney quickly, putting his arms around her. "I will take it. I can ride fast.—I do not mind a bit."

"You are getting to be such a man, dear," said his grandmother, laying her cheek on his hair. "But it is a long way. Are you not too tired, son?"

"Not a bit, Grandmother, I have Christmas in my bones. I'll go put the saddle on old Bill. Why, I expect I'll be back before supper."

He ran off to the stables, and soon rode up to the side steps of the porch. His grandmother was waiting, with a filled basket for the little old

deacon and his child. A warm woolen comforter and some home-knit socks lay on top of the basket, and an old doll of Bessie's, mended and patched, but prettily dressed in red, lay underneath, carefully wrapped in tissue.

Mrs. Elmore thought that nine years looked very small on that big black horse, with dark coming on, and she pulled him down to her and kissed him good-bye before he galloped off down the driveway. The old horse covered the distance in a very short time and it was just nightfall when he reached the little cabin of the deacon. Hardly waiting for the old man's profuse thanks, he turned and started swiftly homeward. It was now growing very dark, for darkness falls quickly on the short winter afternoons.

He could hardly see the road, but giving old Bill the reins, he felt sure that he would keep the road. The old horse knew that he was headed for home, and, not yet having had his supper, he was in just as great a hurry as Barney to reach The Meadows.

Barney whistled lustily as he rode, trying not to feel afraid, but somehow he kept feeling scary inside, despite himself. The trees swayed and creaked about him, and the way home seemed

very much longer than the ride over. Now and then he heard singular noises in the forest on either side of the road, but he decided that it was only the wintry wind, sighing and moaning in the trees. From out the marshes the will-o'-the-wisps twinkled like fireflies and it seemed that a hundred witches' lights were trying to lure him from his course. Finally the wind became calmer and the road somewhat clearer to his vision.

"The moon must be rising," thought Barney. At the same moment a voice called out hoarse and deep: "Ah whoo! Ah whoo! Ah-whoo-ah!" Barney jumped and gripped the reins with all his might. The sound issued from beyond the forks of the road in advance, and he was afraid to ride farther. He remembered, however, that horses always scent danger, and old Bill seemed undisturbed and persisted in keeping his galloping gait. But hark! Just as he reached the forks the deep voice called right at his side: "Ah whoo! Ah whoo! Ah-whoo-a-a-ah!" and something went flapping and whirring right across the road, almost in his face. Instead of falling from his horse in affright, Barney laughed loud and exclaimed: "Well! You sassy old bird! Of all the idiotic cowards I'm

the one, to let a big old wise-owl scare me like that."

He felt immensely relieved and rode on, whistling merrily. The road was growing lighter now and he passed the last mile-post, telling him that he was almost home. He wondered what he would get in his stocking in the morning. He did hope he would find a knife with four blades and a corkscrew—not that he needed a corkscrew, but all the fine knives that he had seen had a corkscrew, and it made a knife so attractive. He wondered if Bessie and Ben would wait for him to come, before hanging their stockings.

Looking up, he was astonished to see a queer-looking object standing, with outstretched arms, in the middle of the road just around the bend. It was dim and gray and shadowy, and appeared to have no neck at all. The head seemed to be fastened right down on the shoulders. Although he was too sensible a boy to believe in ghosts, Barney stopped old Bill stock still and sat on him in the middle of the road, staring at the strange apparition. He was thoroughly frightened this time.

Finally, however, with a mighty effort he summoned all his courage, and touching Bill, he gave

him the reins, saying: "Well, if it is a ghost, I'll ride clean through him and tear him to pieces. If it's a man, I'll ride right over him."

Shutting his eyes tight and setting his teeth, he rode forward at breakneck speed down the road and around the bend. When he was sure that he had passed the fatal spot he drew rein, and opening his eyes cautiously, looked back.

"Well," he said. "I must have ridden through him sure enough, for he isn't there now."

Standing high in his stirrups, his eyes lighted upon the object of his fright, and he sat back in the saddle, too relieved and amused for words; for there in the fence corner in the bend stood a scarecrow. It was dressed in an old linen duster, and a big straw hat, too large in the crown, rested on its head, the edges drooping down on its shoulders. Some of the negroes had, in a spirit of mischief, put it there during the day.

As Barney rode home the moon came up from behind the mountains and shed a lovely golden light through the feathery pines, and he saw the gables of the big white house at The Meadows. Nero ran down to the gate to meet him and jumped on behind him, taking the horse to the stables when they reached the house.

Barney's grandmother met him at the door, then went herself to bring his nice hot supper while he warmed himself at the blazing fire. She sat beside him while he ate, and between bites he gave her an account of his trip. Ben, Bessie, and the cousins came in to hear. When he had finished, all voted him a hero, and Barney's night ride went down in family history.

Every one went to bed early that night. In fact, just as soon as Barney had finished his supper the children ran up-stairs and brought down their stockings to hang in the family sitting-room. Even the pretty cousins hung their stockings and the children laughed in high glee when Jerry walked in and asked Mrs. Elmore to hang up a huge red and white yarn sock for him. With many "Goodnights" and excited whispers, they all went up to bed.

It seemed to Ben that he had barely fallen asleep when he awoke to find daylight streaming in his window, and two little white robed figures tumbling over him, calling: "Christmas gift, Ben! Wake up!" Jumping out of bed and taking hands with them, he and the twins ran to their grandmother's room and burst in upon her, with, "Christmas gift! Christmas gift!"

Then on to the cousins' door they ran, beating upon it and catching their "Christmas gift." Just then the two little negroes, Flem and Nero, appeared in the upper hall, with arms filled with short split pine wood, to build the morning fires. Instantly there was a hue and cry of "Christmas gift," followed by a scampering up and down the hall.

"Christmas giff! Christmas giff!" shouted the little negroes. "Oh, yes, I cotch yer!"

"Oh, no you didn't, kinky head, I caught you!" was the answer.

Fires were lighted in all the rooms, then every one dressed and hurried down to the sitting-room to empty their stockings. Here a regular array of servants met them, each bearing a sack, and there was such a medley of cries of "Christmas giff!" and laughter that one could hardly hear his ears.

When the children had emptied their stockings of their treasures Mrs. Elmore opened the white folding-doors between the parlors and there stood the big tree, dazzling in all its beauty. The Yule log blazed and crackled in the roaring fire, which lit up the gilt frames of the pictures and the mahogany sofas and chairs. How the glass

prisms of the chandelier sparkled in the dancing light! The home-made decorations on the tree were as pretty as any that had been bought. Underneath the tree lay a large pile of bundles, which Mrs. Elmore gave out to the servants. They each contained new articles of linsey and homespun wearing apparel, together with stout shoes and a parcel of cake and candy.

As the last one left, Jerry came in, and the family gifts to one another were distributed. Most of them were home-made, for money was too scarce now for trifles. Many of them were indeed beautiful, too. Jerry had carved an entire set of doll furniture out of white pine for Bessie and stained it a beautiful red, and cousin Ala presented her with a rosy-cheeked wax doll which had belonged to her when she was a little girl. It wore a new dress of gorgeous yellow satin and lace and a yellow velvet hat. Cousins Fannie and Lucy had made a trousseau for the doll,—of silk, swiss, gingham, and wool, with hats to match, and with lovely underwear. Jerry had made some wonderful tops for the boys, and boats of various kinds to sail on the brook and some fantastic kites; and each boy received a fine four-bladed knife, with a corkscrew, from his

grandmother, who had sent to Nashville for them by some one who was passing.

"Grandmother," cried Bessie, "if grandfather and brother George were here, this would be the best Christmas we ever had."

Mrs. Elmore sighed as she thought of her dear ones so far away and wondered if they had received the Christmas boxes that she had sent to them through the lines.

The breakfast bell was ringing when old Jake ran in, calling, "Ole Miss, come out to de front steps quick, and bring de chillun to see whut's dar!"

All the family and all the house servants rushed pell-mell after him. Even old Napoleon came running, with the bell in his hand,—and what do you think they saw? Three beautiful Indian ponies were tied to the banisters with long red halters. One was black and slick; the other two were a little smaller and milk white, and as much alike as two ponies could possibly be. A small saddle was strapped onto the back of each. These were hand-made, of leather, fringed and beaded with red, yellow, green, and blue beads. One of the white ponies bore a little side-saddle and to this was pinned a folded slip of yellow

"Chineabe"

paper, which Mrs. Elmore opened. The note was badly written and spelled so poorly that she could hardly decipher it; but at length she read aloud slowly:

"Big Indian want lil white chillun have heep big Crismus. Him send black pony, big boy Ben. Send lil white ponies lil fillerpener chillun. Heap friend big Indian. Him go in night see red brother. Maybe come back.

"CHINEABE."

THE END

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